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## ISOUNDS OF AMERICA

*A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada*

### Floyd

#### Prince of Players

**Keith Phares** *bar* ..... Edward Kynaston  
**Kate Royal** *sop* ..... Margaret Hughes  
**Alexander Dobson** *bar* ..... Thomas Betterton  
**Chad Shelton** *ten* ..... King Charles II  
**Frank Kelley** *ten* ..... Sir Charles Sedley  
**Vale Rideout** *ten* ..... Villiers, Duke of Buckingham  
**Nicole Heinen** *sop* ..... Miss Frayne  
**Rena Harms** *sop* ..... Nell Gwyn

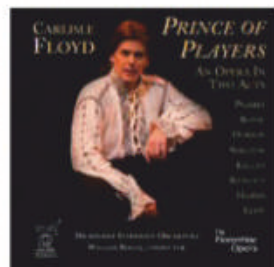
**Florentine Opera Chorus; Milwaukee**

**Symphony Orchestra / William Boggs**

Reference Recordings ® ② FR736 (96' • DDD)

Recorded live at Uihlein Hall, Marcus Center for the Performing Arts, Milwaukee, October 12 & 14, 2018

Includes synopsis and libretto



The full-orchestral version of Carlisle Floyd's *Prince of Players*, premiered in a chamber version at the Houston Grand Opera in 2016, does full justice to the sexual tensions of the historical period it adores, if less provocatively so without the visuals. It is an extended conceit without conceit that musically captures the hedonistic blend of lusty, intellectual Restoration excitements that had the project's grand inspirator Samuel Pepys greeting Charles II's return from exile: 'The shouting and joy expressed by all is past imagination.' As Pepys might have appreciated, Floyd and his collaborative team also gnaw at the relationship between words and music or, as in this case, between music and words.

The structure is signposted by three fragments from a truncated version of the death scene from *Othello* during which Edward Kynaston (Keith Phares) segues from being strangled as Desdemona to strangling as Othello. It seems an obvious device at first but gains enormous cumulative power as the fragments come together. The dramatic impact is heightened by Phares's unswerving classical line and intense underlying emotion set against Kate Royal's stunning portrayal of the era's first female superstar, moving from the music hall to starring with her lover.

The Florentine Opera production features Alexander Dobson's powerful, compassionate Thomas Betterton, tenors Chad Shelton, Frank Kelley and Vale Rideout as the King and his courtiers, and Rena Harms as Nell Gwyn, each of whom give full reign to their key roles. The participation of the Milwaukee Symphony further justifies the decision to record the full-orchestral version, to which Reference does its usual audiophile justice.

Laurence Vittes

### Martinů

#### 'Openings'

The Birds' Feast, H379<sup>a</sup>. Czech Nursery Rhymes, H210. The Opening of the Wells, H354<sup>b</sup>. The Primrose, H348<sup>c</sup>. Songs for a Children's Choir, H373

**Jitro Czech Girls Choir / Jiří Skopal** with <sup>b</sup>**Ludmila Horová** *sop* <sup>b</sup>**Markéta Kubínová** *contr* <sup>b</sup>**Luděk Vele** *ten* <sup>b</sup>**Alfréd Strejček** *narr* <sup>a</sup>**Jiří Houdek** *tpt* <sup>b</sup>**Jindřich Pazdera**, **Josef Kekula**, <sup>c</sup>**Zdeněk Häckl** *vns* <sup>b</sup>**Jan**

**Pěruška** *va* <sup>bc</sup>**Michal Chrobák** *pf*

Navona ® NV6288 (51' • DDD • t)



Has there ever been a composer who, with a simple song (or set of them), communicated

the sheer joy of existence better than Martinů; that deep-seated sense of heart-bursting exhilaration, felt with every intake of breath, at simply being alive? The five brief Moravian folk songs that comprise *The Primrose* (1954) encapsulate this feeling absolutely, delicate yet full of life. The Jitro Czech Girls Choir's bright tone matches the songs' apparent naïveté remarkably well, yet they catch the songs' slightly double-edged character, too, superbly accompanied by Zdeněk Häckl and Michal Chrobák.

The testing programme includes 15 such short songs, grouped into three sets, along with the charming stand-alone *Ptačí body* ('The Birds' Feast', 1959) with its accompanying trumpet, a minor gem of the composer's last year. Two sets are unaccompanied: *Songs for a Children's Choir*, also from 1959, superbly weighted music for younger singers, and the earlier *Czech*

*Nursery Rhymes*, six subtler, expressively more ambiguous settings from 1931 (the year he started composing *Špalíček*). None of these tracks exceeds three minutes, the choir catching their tiny self-contained worlds with flawless intonation and ensemble, a tribute to Jiří Skopal's excellent direction. When we come to the concluding 21-minute cantata *The Opening of the Wells* (as it is usually translated, rather than, as here, *The Opening of the Springs*), the choir prove their musicianship over a much longer time frame, as part of a broader ensemble. The first and best-loved panel of *Songs from the Czech Highlands* (1955-59, four settings of folk-inspired poems by Miroslav Bureš), *The Opening of the Wells* is just a joy to listen to, a wonderful synthesis of the simplicity of folk song with a larger, semi-dramatic canvas. I spent two days listening to this wonderful disc and the broadest of smiles never left my face. I didn't mind the absence of full texts. **Guy Rickards**

### M Monk

#### 'Memory Game'

Double Fiesta. Downfall. Gamemaster's Song. Memory Song. Migration. Spaceship. Tokyo Cha Cha. Totentanz. Waltz in 5s

**Meredith Monk** *sng* **Vocal Ensemble;**

**Bang on a Can All-Stars**

Cantaloupe ® CA21153 (51' • DDD)



Meredith Monk's *Memory Game* (2016-17) can be viewed as one single

composition (not unlike a 1980s concept album), a pair of suites or even as nine separate pieces that nonetheless interconnect. The first five tracks – 'Spaceship', 'Gamemaster's Song', 'Migration', 'Memory Song' and 'Downfall' – form, in the composer's own description, a suite from her science-fiction opera *The Games* (1983-84), which with 'Tokyo Cha Cha' (from *Turtle Dreams Cabaret*, 1983) and 'Double Fiesta' (1986, from *Acts from Under and Above*) have been reimagined here in arrangements by Bang on a Can All-Stars' David Lang, Michael





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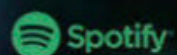
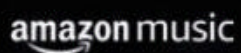
*"Feel the contagious joy of Järvillepp" – Sonograma*

*"Great, great, great!" – The Whole Note*

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AVAILABLE NOW WHEREVER YOU LISTEN TO MUSIC







The Jitro Czech Girls Choir bring an appropriately bright tone to wonderful choral songs by Martinů – see review on page I

Gordon, Ken Thomson and Julia Wolfe, as well as Monk's vocal ensemble colleague Allison Sniffin.

The suite from *The Games* sets the tone for the album: the musical style may be to mainstream opera what the graphic novel is to *King Lear* but it has a catchy cinematic immediacy. The opera's dystopian vision of ritualistic games enacted by humanity on a new home planet is like a cross between *The Hunger Games* and *Serenity* while the baleful figure of the Gamemaster – a combination of the MC from *Cabaret* and Killian from *The Running Man*, brilliantly declaimed in a virtuoso, theatrical rendition by Theo Blackmann – leads the new Mankind into Downfall. As a move on from that denouement, Monk has collated four pieces from other theatre pieces of hers to take the concept in a different direction. The arrangements of the latter quartet make them fit sonically with *The Games* suite here, but at some cost: the two-piano original of *Totentanz* (2006; available on YouTube) has a much greater, Stravinskian bite than in David Lang's reworking. I am not a fan of some of the, let's call it naive, vocalisation style but this is, on the whole, an intriguing release, a touch fiercely recorded. Devotees of Monk need not hesitate. **Guy Rickards**

## 'And That One Too'

**Akiho Haiku 2 Crowell** Music for Percussion Quartet<sup>a</sup> **Kirsten** she is a myth<sup>b</sup> **Kotcheff** not only that one but that one & that too

**Sandbox Percussion** with <sup>b</sup>**Amy Beth Kirsten** *sng*

<sup>a</sup>**David Crowell** *gtr*

Coviello Contemporary © COV91918 (53' • DDD)



Sandbox Percussion, an ensemble based in New York, have been expanding the repertoire for their vast array of instruments since 2011. The four works on their debut album, 'And That One Too', reveal both the refined virtuosity the musicians have cultivated and their exceptional taste in choosing composers who write for percussion with vibrant and elegant imagination.

Each of the pieces proclaims, in all sorts of subtle ways, how colourful and varied the music shaped for percussion instruments can be. There is rarely a moment when bombast intrudes upon the dreamy, glistening and propulsive narratives. Andy Akiho's *Haiku 2*, for example, radiantly transfers the structure of the Japanese poetic form to the gleaming sonorities of bells, wood blocks and other instruments pitched and unpitched.

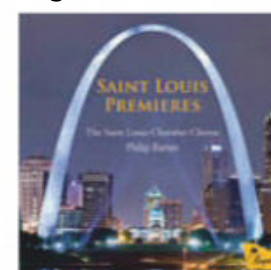
The four movements of David Crowell's *Music for Percussion Quartet* range from energetic flourishes and layered rhythms to sustain halos of sound. Patterns change organically as the instruments – including guitar, played by the composer – interact with seamless animation or stillness. The composer Amy Beth Kirsten is also present

as vocalist (on three tracks) in the effervescent *she is a myth*, repeating bits of text in quick succession amid the delicate rustlings and tappings of the percussion.

The disc draws its title from Thomas Kotcheff's *not only that one but that one & that too*, whose three movements give Sandbox members Jonathan Allen, Victor Caccese, Ian Rosenbaum and Terry Sweeney many opportunities to connect on a multiplicity of instruments while evoking haunting and ritualistic soundscapes. Silence is as crucial in Kotcheff's creation as are hushed gestures, ominous rumblings and bold action. Playing in this Sandbox must be bliss for these sophisticated artists. **Donald Rosenberg**

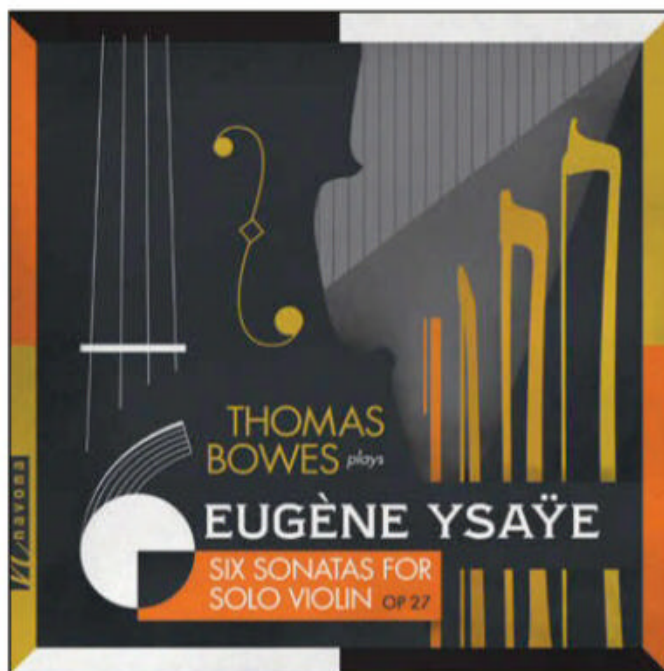
## 'Saint Louis Premieres'

**Bingham** Ceaselessly weaving your name  
**Dove** The Kerry Christmas Carol **Dunphy**  
Suite Remembrance **Ešenvalds** In the bleak midwinter. On Friendship **G Jackson** Felices ter et amplius **Maclean** That I did always love **Manning** It is not for kings, Lemuel **Traditional**  
Drink to me only with thine eyes (arr J Garrett).  
Maker of all things (arr O Johnson) **R Walker**  
The Ale Songbook  
**The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus / Philip Barnes**  
Regent © REGCD541 (68' • DDD • T/t)



The Saint Louis Chamber Chorus stand out for many reasons, among them





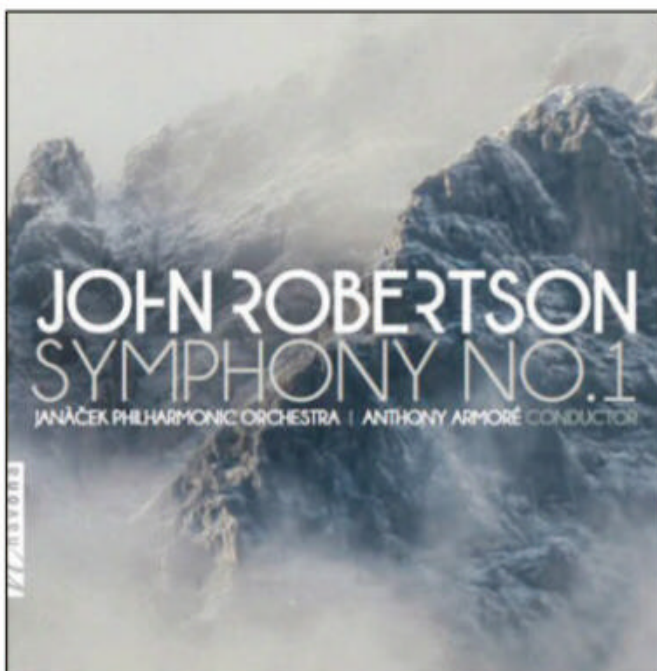
## EUGÈNE YSAÿE THOMAS BOWES

Known for his complete recording of all Bach's sonatas and partitas, European virtuoso Thomas Bowes has now embarked on another quest for totality. This time, it is the six sonatas by Ysaÿe, presented on Bowes' new album, **EUGÈNE YSAÿE: SIX SONATAS FOR SOLO VIOLIN**.

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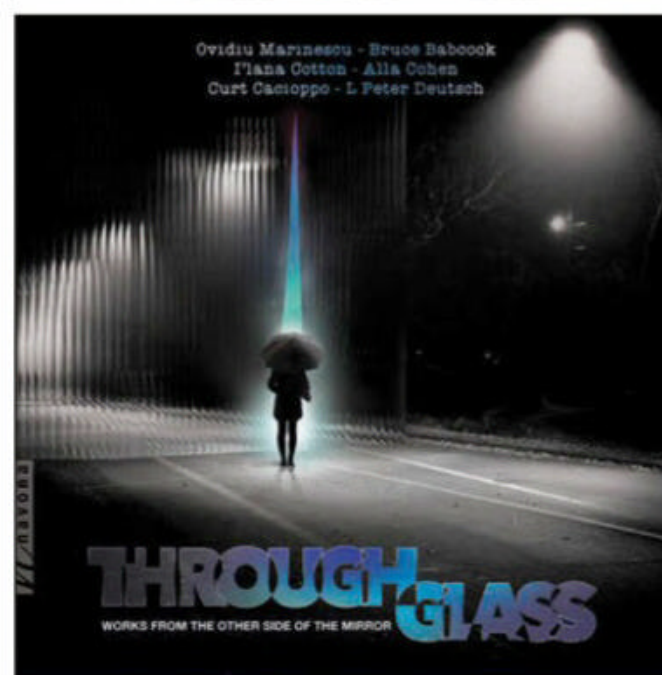
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I'ana Cotton's piece *The Return* is featured on **THROUGH GLASS**, a collection of new solo and chamber piano music. The composer's work bridges Ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu and French avant garde composer Olivier Messiaen, centering around a beautiful dark mode and the melodic variations it generates.

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a mellifluous approach to ensemble-singing that benefits everything their collective voices touch. The group deserves a special round of applause for its devotion to expanding the choral repertoire. Each of the 11 works performed here is a recent commission written specifically for the gifts director Philip Barnes and his colleagues have honed for decades.

British-born Barnes has led the chorus since 1989, both in core literature and in new scores. On this, his 14th disc with the ensemble, Barnes presides over a varied menu of music by British, New Zealand, Latvian, American and Australian-American composers. Several themes bind the

works – marriage, friendship, imbibing, spirituality, dancing – and they share musical immediacy, warmth and clarity of texture.

Two of the selections are traditional yet sound newly minted in the sensitive arrangements by Jon Garrett ('Drink to me only with thine eyes') and Orrin Johnson ('Maker of all things'). Gabriel Jackson's *Felices ter et amplius* is an ebullient paean to marriage, while Judith Bingham's exquisite *Ceaselessly weaving your name* depicts the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope in slow, undulating lines and Clare Maclean employs two poems of Emily Dickinson in her lyrical ode to marriage, *That I did always love*. Lilting and soaring phrases pervade Ēriks

Ešenvalds's luminous *On Friendship*, as they do his affectionate *In the bleak midwinter*. Jonathan Dove creates a choral web of buoyant strands in *The Kerry Christmas Carol*.

On a particularly spirited set of notes is Robert Walker's *The Ale Songbook*, replete with bagpipe drones, cautionary sentiments and whimsical activity via verses by Poe, Burns and friends. Sasha Johnson Manning provides another view of the drink in her touching *It is not for kings, Lemuel*. To end the disc, the four beautifully compact songs that comprise Melissa Dunphy's *Suite Remembrance* take splendid advantage of the ensemble's exceptional flexibility and cohesion. **Donald Rosenberg**

## Academy of Music, Philadelphia

Our monthly guide to North American venues

**Year opened** 1857

**Architect** Napoleon LeBrun and Gustavus Runge

**Capacity** 2509

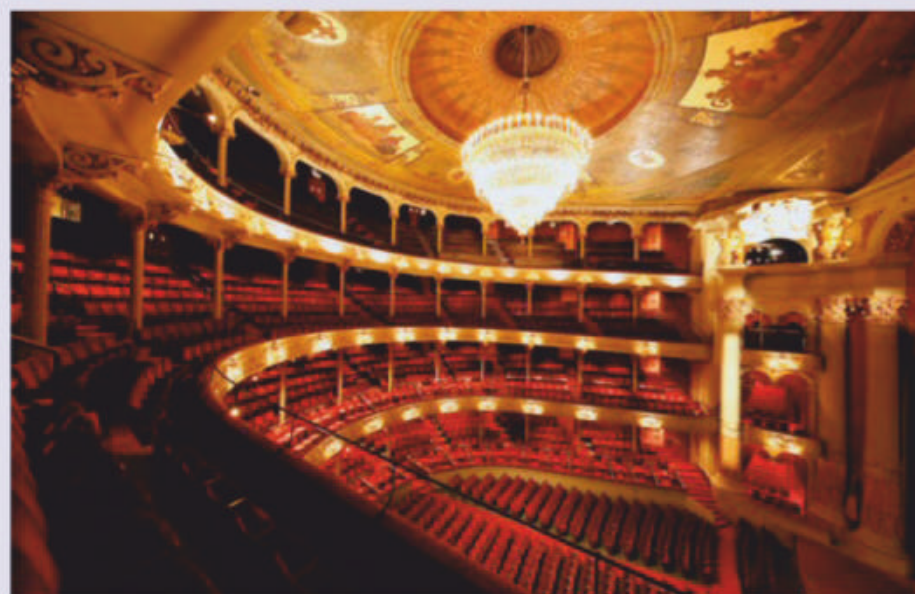
**Resident ensembles** Opera Philadelphia; Pennsylvania Ballet

Walking into Philadelphia's Academy of Music often comes with a time-warp moment: isn't there a well-circulated photo of Arturo Toscanini standing next to that very pillar? And aren't there photos of Sergey Rachmaninov with an unrecognisably young Eugene Ormandy hunching over a score on that very stage?

One need not know that the Academy of Music is America's oldest still-functioning opera house in order to have a déjà vu moment on first visit. Having opened in 1857, the Academy has an architectural resemblance to the Teatro alla Scala and was memorably featured in the Martin Scorsese film *The Age of Innocence*, set in 1870. A bust of Mozart sits at the top of the proscenium. Statues of Atlas seem to hold up the walls. A chandelier – said to contain 23,000 crystals – hangs over the 2500 seats. Though the home of the Philadelphia Orchestra for more than a century (1900-2001), the Academy has returned to its original theatrical purpose with increased activity from Opera Philadelphia and Pennsylvania Ballet, plus touring Broadway shows. After ongoing renovations costing around \$70 million over the past two decades, the Academy has never looked shinier.

The Academy has long mirrored the history and character of Philadelphia itself. While many American cities were tearing themselves down in the 1960s in what was called urban renewal, economically depressed Center City Philadelphia went to seed, but was left intact. Handsome townhouses dating back to the early 1800s, when Lorenzo da Ponte lived in Philadelphia, had spectacular 1980s renovations – with the Academy standing out as a towering example of what Philadelphia had been and could be again.

Inside the theatre, the auditorium had its tough moments. Sitting the middle of a big sports town, the Academy was the setting of a hard-to-imagine indoor football game. The bust of Mozart must have wept. Beverly Sills talked about having 'brought down the house – literally' when objects from the ceiling began falling during one of her concerts. The Academy needed work and Philadelphia needed an alternative venue – an idea



championed by Riccardo Muti during his Philadelphia Orchestra tenure (1980-92), eventually resulting in the Kimmel Center being built a few blocks away. Though still owned by the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Academy is administered by the Kimmel Center.

Academy acoustics have long been dry, though during Leopold Stokowski's tenure (1912-38), the hall hosted some excellent experimental stereo recordings made in the 1930s by Bell Laboratories. Opera always fared well there. But renovations during later years in the Ormandy era (1936-80) didn't improve the situation. Such acoustical conditions may not be apparent in Yannick Nézet-Séguin's forthcoming 2020 live recording of Rachmaninov's Symphony No 3 for which he returned the orchestra to the hall where the piece was premiered. An onstage sound shell creates favourable playing conditions for the orchestra – and for well-placed microphones.

Like many old theatres, this one has secrets and skeletons in the closet. In 1947 Kirsten Flagstad walked into an organised booing campaign, having been inaccurately accused of Nazi sympathies. Somewhere backstage, there is said to be a room where Stokowski 'entertained' his female admirers. The handiest secret is a stage-right box that is never locked and rarely populated: we've all had to make emergency departures from performances that don't permit return seating, but if you know where that box is, you can always slip back into the theatre. **David Patrick Stearns**



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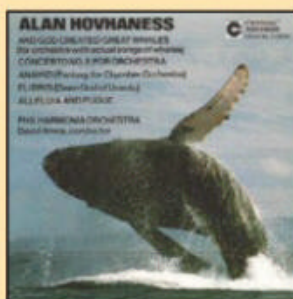
**CD810 (pictured):** And God Created Great Whales, Anahid, Elibris, Alleluia & Fugue, Concerto #8 for Orchestra. Philharmonia Orch. **CD802:** St. Vartan Symphony, "Artik"

Horn Concerto. National Phil. of London & Israel Philharmonic. **CD803:** Majnun Symphony. National Phil. of London. **CD804:** Etchmiadzin Symphony, Fra Angelico, Mountains & Rivers Without End. Royal Philharmonic. **CD801:** All Men Are Brothers (Sym. 11, Royal Philharmonic), Prayer of St. Gregory, Tzaiker, Armenian Rhapsody No.1. **CD807:** Odysseus Symphony, Celestial Gate, Prayer of St. Gregory. Polyphonia Orchestra. **CD811:** Hovhaness Treasures: his favorite works. Christmas Symphony, Celestial Canticle, Starry Night, etc. Gerard Schwarz & Hovhaness, conductors.

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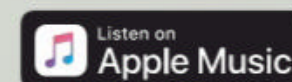


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# A LETTER FROM *Montreal*

Arthur Kaptainis reports on some of the longer-term consequences of the current pandemic for his home town



At the beginning of May came a glimmer of sunshine. A poll of about a thousand Quebec residents by the respected Léger firm revealed that 55 per cent had bought a ticket to a show of some kind during the previous year and that 99 per cent of these would be willing to return to the theatre or concert hall.

The catch was how long they planned to wait. About half of the respondents aged 55 and over – representing a crucial demographic for classical presenters – said ‘several months’. A rather vague precondition, but quite in keeping with the foggy outlook in the arts-friendly city, where a province-wide ban on public gatherings until August 31 entailed the loss of the much-loved and lucrative Montreal International Jazz Festival and the postponement of the Canadian Grand Prix.

Notable classical casualties included three Montreal Symphony Orchestra performances in June of Mahler’s Second Symphony intended as a subscription-series farewell to music director Kent Nagano. Those concerts were said to be postponed, but with no indication of when we might expect the resurrection. Nagano’s final finale, a free outdoor Beethoven Ninth in Olympic Park in August that would (to judge from prior such concerts) have attracted tens of thousands, had to be cancelled outright.

Such is the situation, of course, in many musical jurisdictions. But for the MSO the Covid-19 crisis not only decimated the balance of the 2019-20 season but delayed the announcement of 2020-21, a season that was set to proceed without a replacement for Nagano. Indeed, the search for a successor itself suffered a setback since the cancelled concerts included appearances by such likely suspects as Susanna Mälkki, Juanjo Mena, Vasily Petrenko and Jérémie Rhorer. Considering the advance notice such conductors require, it is possible that 2021-22 will also be an interregnum season. Will subscribers continue to renew?

The Orchestre Métropolitain suffers no such uncertainty, having last September appointed Yannick Nézet-Séguin artistic director and principal conductor for life, but the rival orchestra also faces hardships. One unfortunate loss in May was a programme that was to be the basis of a recording for ATMA Classique of Sibelius’s Third Symphony. Another was a cycle of Beethoven piano concertos with Marc-André Hamelin for the summer Lanaudière Festival outside Montreal. As for the Concours musical international de Montréal, it confidently announced May 22 – June 2, 2021, as its new dates and made clear that the 24 pianists selected for the 2020 scrimmage will be welcome. The Opéra de Montréal reluctantly cancelled a May run of *The Magic Flute* in Barrie Kosky’s vaudevillian version. Like many cultural organisations, the company encouraged advance ticket buyers to treat their purchases as a donation.

**Like many cultural organisations, the Opéra de Montréal encouraged advance ticket buyers to treat their purchases as a donation**

Societies and musicians everywhere have put a brave internet face on the crisis by streaming archival concerts. As one of the rare collaborators on this side of the Atlantic with Medici.tv, the MSO could post stream-worthy videos on its website, as well as in-house productions and documentaries (though of course none involving headline-tainted Charles Dutoit, who, as music director from 1977 to 2002, established the good name of the orchestra).


Probably the most fascinating stream was a grainy television broadcast, drawn from the vaults of Radio-Canada, documenting the OSM’s 1963 inauguration of the Grande Salle of Place des Arts, the big all-purpose hall (later called Salle Wilfrid-Pelletier) that the Maison symphonique superseded in 2011. Included was a tremendously vital (if occasionally spotty) Mahler Symphony No 1 under the orchestra’s 27-year-old music director Zubin Mehta. Sharing the podium was the orchestra’s founding music director,

Wilfrid Pelletier, who spent some years as the go-to guy for French repertoire at the Metropolitan Opera.

Far from a spent force, this native Montrealer was a virile figure at the age of 70 who

kept a firm hand on a long and headache-inducing exercise in atonality by one of the leading Quebec modernists of the day (whom I shall allow to rest in peace). Interesting to note that the concert began with *O Canada*, not yet officially the national anthem and perhaps then still heard by some in the crowd as a patriotic French-Canadian song. About the provenance of *God Save the Queen*, heard immediately after, there could be no confusion.

Concerts overseen by Nagano included a sharp-edged *Rite of Spring* in the Berlin Philharmonie from March 25, 2019, and a Bruckner Sixth in Montreal from April 16, 2013. (Inclined to Austro-German programming at home, Nagano was generally willing to perpetuate the orchestra’s Franco-Russian image abroad.) The *Adagio* of the Bruckner was remarkable for full observance of the *lang gezogen* indications with no loss of forward momentum. Brass fanfares in the following two movements were splendid. Alas, only one of the four horns heard in this performance remains on the roster. Nagano’s long goodbye means that the many vacancies in the orchestra must be filled by subs – outgoing music directors not being allowed to oversee auditions.

Such matters tend to recede into the background at a time of crisis. Nagano, whose philosophic frame of mind was apparent in his book *Classical Music: Expect the Unexpected*, issued a public statement in French and English pointing out that music ‘allows us to overcome fear and rise above the usual limits of tolerance’ through its unique ability to harness the ‘here and now’ with ‘memory and hope’. Thought-provoking. I’ll take it. 



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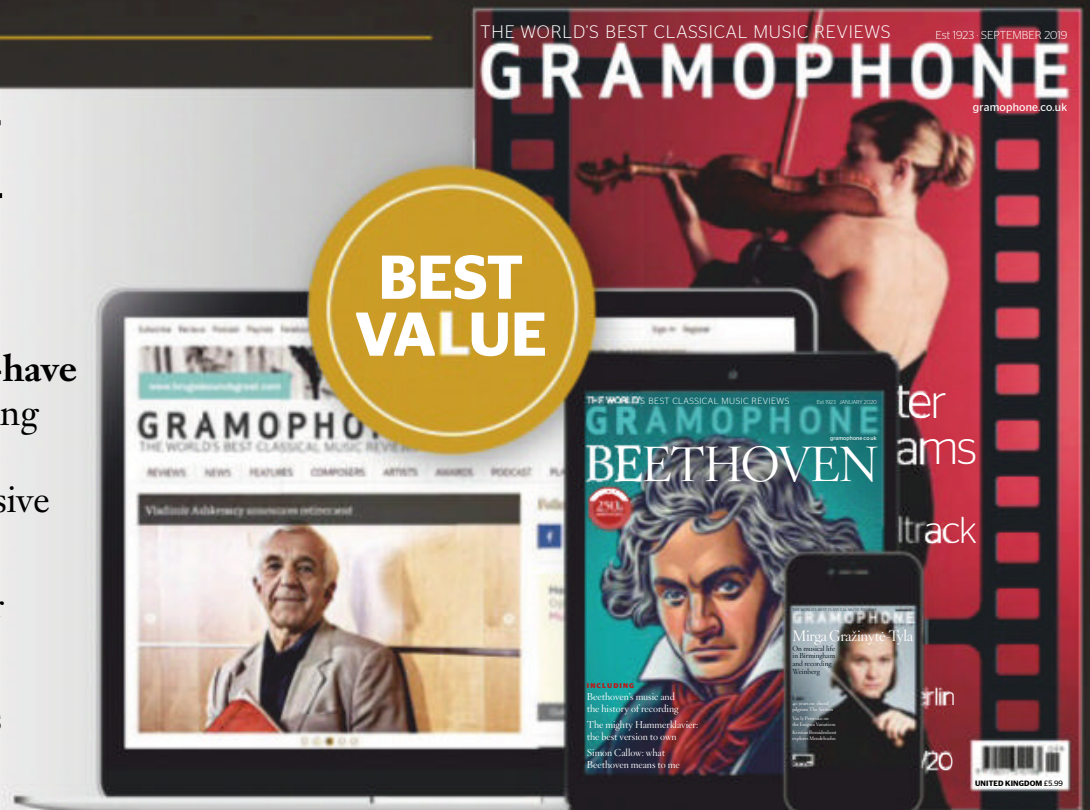
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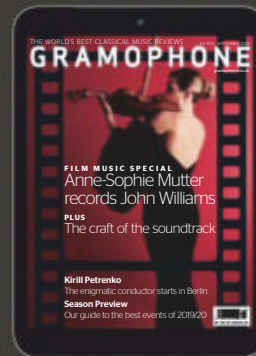
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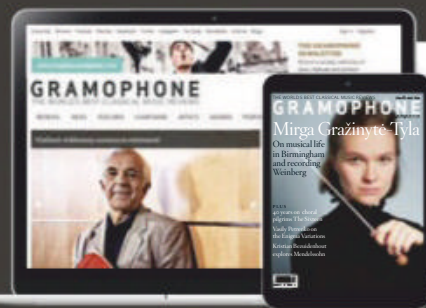
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## If we value music, how should we express that?

Many of you, I suspect, have lived much of your musical life online these past months – much of your life in general, perhaps. And while an ever-increasing migration to the virtual sphere is not a wholly positive social development, at such times as these it has largely been a blessing. Without it, our distance from each other as members of a classical music community, artists and audiences alike, would have felt far further than it does now.

I've written before about some of the ways artists have continued to communicate. Well, last month, it was our turn, when we held a gala in aid of Help Musicians UK, in which former *Gramophone* Award winners from around the world contributed three hours of performances, reaching more than 200,000 viewers. Also in May came a very different offering. Every year our industry gathers for the Classical:NEXT conference – several days of events and showcases – and this year we were due to host a conversation between our Editor-in-Chief, James Jolly, and the President of Deutsche Grammophon, Clemens Trautmann. Undaunted, we held it online, and ironically, with more than 4400 views (so far), it has reached a far larger audience than any lecture theatre would have held.

The subject was how you balance art and commerce, the creative and the commercial. One is often viewed as the antithesis, or even the antagonist, to the other but in reality this doesn't need to be the case. The complex balance of funding, sponsorship, and ticket and record sales that pay for performances and



*Martin*

performers is a precarious one, and when it becomes ill-weighted, as we've seen during lockdown, it calls for adjustments. That might involve extra state support to preserve something precious in our society, or additional generosity from those who can help, or the honest valuing of art by us audiences through buying albums, subscribing to streaming services, or paying for performances, digital or otherwise.

Full disclosure: I enjoy, and am grateful for, many free streams – and we must remember that, for many people, free access to the highest-quality performances may unlock a life-long love of music. But in the end, it's of course about balance. In our news pages we report on two new initiatives launched this month from key players – DG Premium and Idagio's Global Concert Hall – which involve offering ticketed online concerts, and may point an interesting way ahead.

One bright spot in a bleak few months has been some sales success for recordings. Classical music shop Presto reports a 30 per cent increase in CD sales and an extraordinary 80 per cent increase in downloads over this recent period. Scottish label Delphian, meanwhile, is already on its third pressing of the new Bach album from guitarist Sean Shibe. Others I have spoken to say their initial fears have not proved founded, as record buyers have continued to show their support. Everybody wins when someone pays for music – the artists, the labels who lavish love on preserving their performances, and the listeners whose lives are enriched by the experience of hearing them. If we value music, we need to all reflect on how we show that.

**[martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com](mailto:martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com)**

## THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Barbirolli's individual yet selfless music-making has been an obsession since his Elgar swept me off my

feet four decades ago,' says **ANDREW FARACH-COLTON**, author of our cover story. 'Having the chance to explore his discography afresh was an inspirational adventure.'



'Jean-Efflam Bavouzet compared the music of Debussy to a magical dream that evaporates,'

recalls **MICHELLE ASSAY**. 'I think of my delightful conversation with him, which happened just before the curtains fell on live music, also as an enchanted dream – one forever imprinted on my mind.'



There's always a danger that the more you listen, the clearer it becomes that your previous go-to version

doesn't quite cut the mustard after all,' says **CHARLOTTE GARDNER**, who writes this issue's Collection. 'So part of the joy with Beethoven's Violin Concerto was my existing favourites doing so very well!'

*Gramophone*, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is *the* magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

**THE REVIEWERS** Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Michelle Assay • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepilova • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Edward Seckerson • Mark Seow • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman



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EDITORIAL

**Phone** 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325  
**email** gramophone@markallengroup.com  
**EDITOR AND PUBLISHER** Martin Cullingford  
**DEPUTY EDITOR** Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365  
**REVIEWS EDITOR** Tim Parry / 020 7501 6367  
**ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR** James McCarthy  
**SUB-EDITOR** David Threasher / 020 7501 6370  
**SUB-EDITOR** Marija Đurić Speare  
**ART DIRECTOR** Dinah Lone / 020 7501 6689  
**PICTURE EDITOR** Sunita Sharma-Gibson  
**AUDIO EDITOR** Andrew Everard  
**EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR** Libby McPhee  
**THANKS TO** Hannah Nepilova  
**EDITOR-IN-CHIEF** James Jolly

ADVERTISING

**Phone** 020 7738 5454 **Fax** 020 7733 2325  
**email** gramophone.ads@markallengroup.com  
**COMMERCIAL MANAGER**  
Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368  
**SENIOR SALES EXECUTIVE**  
Gordana Jević / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES

0800 137201 **(UK)** +44 (0)1722 716997 **(overseas)**  
subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

**Phone** 020 7738 5454  
**HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL STRATEGY** Luca Da Rè / 020 7501 6362  
**MARKETING MANAGER**  
John Barnett / 020 7501 6233  
**GROUP INSTITUTIONAL SALES MANAGER** Jas Atwal  
**PRODUCTION DIRECTOR**  
Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997  
**PRODUCTION MANAGER** Kyri Apostolou  
**CIRCULATION DIRECTOR**  
Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997  
**SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER**  
Bethany Foy / 01722 716997  
**EDITORIAL DIRECTOR** Martin Cullingford  
**MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Geoghegan  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER** Ben Allen  
**CHAIRMAN** Mark Allen



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## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

### ALWYN

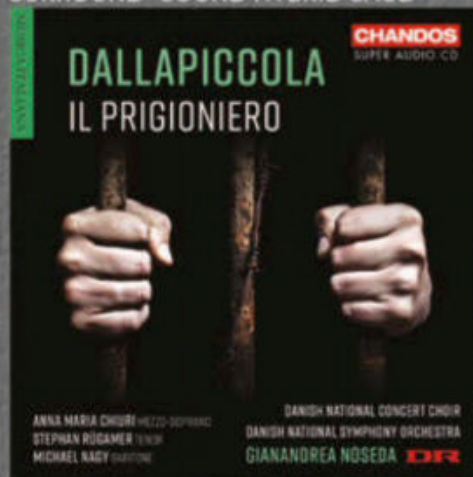
#### MISS JULIE

Anna Patalong | Rosie Aldridge | Samuel Sakker  
Benedict Nelson | BBC Symphony Orchestra  
Sakari Oramo

Sakari Oramo and the BBC Symphony Orchestra support an outstanding cast featuring Anna Patalong in the title role in their acclaimed revival of Alwyn's neglected masterpiece.

CHSA 5253(2)

SURROUND-SOUND HYBRID SACD



### DALLAPICCOLA IL PRIGIONIERO

Anna Maria Chiuri | Stephan Rügamer  
Michael Nagy | Danish National  
Concert Choir | Danish National  
Symphony Orchestra  
Gianandrea Noseda

Gianandrea Noseda continues his series of recordings of the works of Luigi Dallapiccola with his one-act opera *Il prigioniero* (The Prisoner), seen by many as his crowning achievement.

CHSA 5276

ALREADY AVAILABLE



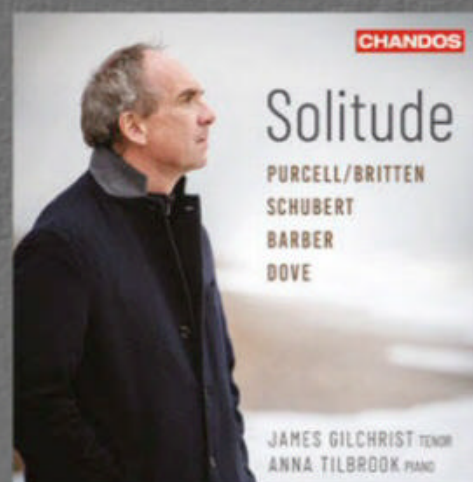
### KORNGOLD VIOLIN CONCERTO, STRING SEXTET

Andrew Haveron | Sinfonia of London  
Chamber Ensemble | RTÉ Concert  
Orchestra | John Wilson

'The performance of this movement [Romanze] alone makes the release a compulsory purchase... Recommended for sure...'

David Gutman – *ClassicalSource.com*  
22 April 2020

CHAN 20135



### SOLITUDE – SONGS BY BARBER, DOVE, SCHUBERT, PURCELL/BRITTEN

James Gilchrist | Anna Tilbrook

This exquisitely programmed and performed recital explores the theme of solitude in its many forms.

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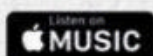
### D. SCARLATTI PIANO SONATAS, VOL. 2

Federico Colli

'... The real point of this recording is Federico Colli's wonderful pianism.'  
Michael Church – *BBC Music Magazine*  
Recording of the Month – April 2020

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# GRAMOPHONE *Editor's choice*

**Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews**

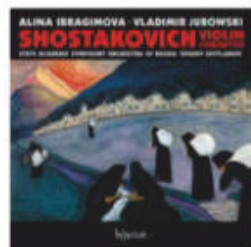


RECORDING OF THE MONTH



**'A NEW CENTURY'**  
The Cleveland Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst  
Cleveland Orchestra  
► **PETER QUANTRILL'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 28**

Elegantly sweeping Strauss, an excellent Prokofiev Third, a stylish up-scaling of Beethoven's Op 132 String Quartet – and more – this set reflects an orchestral partnership of the first rank.



**SHOSTAKOVICH**  
Violin Concertos Nos 1 & 2  
**Alina Ibragimova** *vn* State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia  
'Evgeny Svetlanov' /

**Vladimir Jurowski**  
Hyperion  
An extraordinary performance from Alina Ibragimova, visceral and strongly personal.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



**BEACH. ELGAR**  
Piano Quintets  
**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf*  
Takács Quartet  
Hyperion  
Deeply reflective

playing of these beautiful and emotionally crafted quintets from the ever-impressive Takács Quartet, joined by a perfect partner in pianist Garrick Ohlsson.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 44**



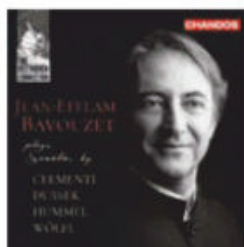
**BEETHOVEN** Violin Sonatas Nos 4, 5 & 8  
**James Ehnes** *vn*  
**Andrew Armstrong** *pf*  
Onyx  
With the quality of

musicianship and the captivating rapport between players every bit as compelling as on the previous two instalments, this series gains another Editor's Choice.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 45**



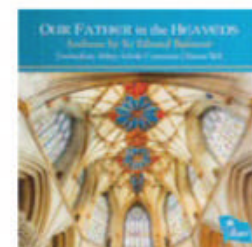
**JS BACH**  
Six Solo Cello Suites  
**Alisa Weilerstein** *vc*  
Pentatone  
Alisa Weilerstein embraces the full

emotional and technical range of Bach's Solo Cello suites with open-hearted devotion – richly coloured playing held aloft in a lovely acoustic.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



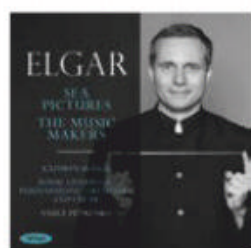
**'THE BEETHOVEN CONNECTION'**  
**Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *pf*  
Chandos  
From an acclaimed Beethoven pianist,

a delightfully imaginative, and gloriously performed, contribution to the composer's anniversary year – an exploration not of him, but of his contemporaries.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 61**



**BAIRSTOW** Our Father in the Heavens  
Tewkesbury Abbey  
Schola Cantorum /  
**Simon Bell**  
Regent

These stirring performances of anthems by English composer Bairstow are a gloriously atmospheric celebration of the UK choral tradition presently silenced.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



**ELGAR** The Music Makers. Sea Pictures  
**Kathryn Rudge** *mez*  
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /  
**Vasily Petrenko**

**Onyx**  
The catalogue gains stunning new interpretations of two of Elgar's finest vocal works, *Sea Pictures* and *Music Makers*.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



**KREEK** The Suspended Harp of Babel  
**Vox Clamantis** /  
**Jaan-Eik Tulve**  
ECM New Series

A beautiful, mesmeric recording of music by Estonian composer Cyrillus Kreek, weaving a poignant path through music of faith and folk origins, and exquisitely performed.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 66**



**'ARION'**  
**Natalya Romaniw** *sop*  
**Lada Valešová** *pf*  
Orchid  
Welsh soprano  
Natalya Romaniw

possesses a truly beautiful soprano, rich and deeply communicative, as she explores her Slavic roots with a passionately performed selection of songs.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 71**



**DVD/BLU-RAY**  
**RESPIGHI** La bella dormiente nel bosco  
Teatro Lirico di Cagliari / Donato Renzetti  
Naxos  
Respighi's take on the Sleeping Beauty story is a ravishing, magical delight for both ears and eyes in this excellent production from Teatro Lirico di Cagliari.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 77**



**REISSUE/ARCHIVE**  
**BEETHOVEN. MOZART** Piano Concertos  
**Friedrich Gulda** *pf*  
SWR Classic

There's much to admire in these performances by Friedrich Gulda, made for radio between 1959 and 1962, united on this SWR Classic set.  
► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**



# FOR THE RECORD

## DG Premium to offer online ticketed concerts

Deutsche Grammophon has launched a new online destination called Deutsche Grammophon Premium, offering both free content as well as pay-per-view events available through the new DG Stage portal.

Specially filmed concerts will feature Yellow Label artists of the calibre of singers Anna Netrebko and Rolando Villazón, conductor Andris Nelsons, pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim, and film composer John Williams alongside violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter and the Vienna Philharmonic. Documentaries already posted include portraits of conductor Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla and pianist Daniil Trifonov. Another strand will also see performances from last year's Bayreuth Festival made available to view for a fee.

The ticketed portion of the site, which will offer live-streamed concerts, is called DG Stage, and according to DG's President, Clemens Trautmann, 'our aim in setting [it up] is to give our



Stars of stage and screen: Anne-Sophie Mutter and John Williams

community of artists the widest possible reach and a tool that allows their live performances to be remunerated by their fanbase and other classical music lovers. And we want to give a worldwide audience access to exciting audiovisual concert experiences at any time and enable people to revisit favourite and legendary productions from our archive.'

DG Premium will also provide access to 120 recordings from the label's long history and will also give music-lovers another opportunity to watch some of the

company's pioneering 'Moment Musical' concerts given by Berlin-based artists during lockdown, a selection from the label's Yellow Lounge events, concerts by the Berlin Philharmonic, documentaries and the film of Deutsche Grammophon's 120th-Anniversary Concert at Beijing's Forbidden City. Visit [dg-premium.com](https://www.dg-premium.com) for more information.



## Idagio launch pay-per-view concert hall

Streaming service Idagio has also joined DG (see above) in making ticketed online performances available. The Global Concert Hall will provide a platform for artists and ensembles to offer exclusive digital concerts on a pay-per-view basis, with 80 per cent of the net proceeds from ticket sales going to the artists. Concerts, priced at €9.90, will be available for 24 hours after the initial broadcast, while artists will be able to communicate with

their virtual audience after the performance in the Virtual Green Room.

'The pandemic has led to an unprecedented increase in the popularity of classical music streaming, but almost all of the digital concerts are offered for free,' said Idagio Founder Till Janczukowicz. 'In the near future artists will rely on earning an income online, and audiences want more programmatic variety – both now and whenever the current restrictions are lifted. The internet should provide more than archived broadcasts of old recordings: it's a medium that offers new opportunities, and we want to use these for classical music.'

The opening concert took place on May 29, with Norwegian violinist Mari Samuelsen (pictured above). Further concerts planned in June include violinist Christian Tetzlaff, soprano Kristine Opolais and pianist Garrick Ohlsson. Another is baritone Thomas Hampson, who also stressed the importance of artist remuneration: 'With the coronavirus crisis, the concert and opera sector has come to a complete standstill. At the same time, the situation that has developed where streamed performances are offered for free devalues artists' work and threatens our livelihood. The Global Concert Hall marks the beginning of a new era, since it is not only a virtual stage and a site for artistic experimentation. It also helps artists to be proactive and to take charge of the current situation.'

## Dalia Stasevska to head Lahti Symphony



The new Chief Conductor of the Lahti Symphony Orchestra has been named as Dalia Stasevska. She takes up the role with the

2021/22 season, and from 2021 will also take on the role of artistic director of the orchestra's Sibelius Festival.

'For me, the Lahti Symphony Orchestra has long held a very special position,' said the Finnish conductor, who has also held the post of Principal Guest conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra since 2019.

'In Lahti there's a tremendous amount of potential; the orchestra's players are inspired, they are minded to do great things and open to a wide range of repertoire and ideas. It's also a great pleasure to continue the Lahti Symphony Orchestra's important work with the music of Sibelius.' The orchestra's famed reputation in the composer's music include a number of acclaimed recordings under former conductor Osmo Vänskä which received three *Gramophone* Awards.



# First steps to live performances taken

Just a few weeks ago it seemed distinctly uncertain whether there would be any chance of watching live music-making this summer. Now – for a limited, and lucky, few – a number of organisations have announced plans to perform for live audiences, albeit each stressing that they are strictly working within the restrictions imposed by their respective governments.

On June 15, within a few days of the publication of this issue, the Bergen Philharmonic is set to mark Grieg's birthday with its first public performance since lockdown. Following the lifting of many virus-related restrictions in Norway, there will be two performances that evening, each for 200 guests, all of whom have contributed to fighting Covid-19.

The following week, on June 21, Riccardo Muti will open a re-imagined Ravenna festival – set to be the first public concerts in Italy since lockdown began.



Keeping the spirit of Pärnu: Paavo Järvi and players

Running until July 30, the festival will offer 40 open-air events in the city's 15th-century fortress, Rocca Brancalone for audiences of up to 250 people.

Then in July, Estonia's Pärnu Music Festival has announced that its 10th anniversary season will still go ahead from July 16 to July 23, albeit with a new programme, and to audiences of approximately 300, each concert also being live-streamed. The focus will be on Estonian artists, both young and established, and music will feature works by Estonian composers Lepo Sumera and Tõnu Kõrvits. Conducting masterclasses will also be streamed live. 'Even though the musical celebrations will be smaller than originally planned, the spirit of Pärnu will compensate one hundred fold and I cannot wait to return to one of my favourite places to be reunited with so many friends on stage,' said conductor Paavo Järvi.

## ONE TO WATCH

### *Amatis Piano Trio*

In 2014, the German violinist Lea Hausmann and British cellist Samuel Shepherd were busking together in Amsterdam when they decided they wanted to form a piano trio. In search of a pianist, they attended the International Liszt Competition that was taking place in Utrecht, and invited the Chinese/Dutch pianist Mengjie Han – who won the third prize – to join them. They formed the Amatis Piano Trio, and gave their first performance a week later.

Accolades came quickly. They won the Parkhouse Award in 2015, the final taking place at Wigmore Hall, where they have subsequently performed numerous times. In 2016 they were selected for the BBC New Generation Artists scheme, and then in the 2018/19 season they were chosen as ECHO (European Concert Hall Organisation) Rising Stars, and toured many of Europe's leading concert venues. In 2020 they were awarded a Borletti-Buitoni Trust Fellowship.

The three musicians have developed a close bond, and their individual personalities shine through while also blending to form a strongly communicative ensemble. They have made



their first commercial recording, for AVI-Music, including Ravel's mature Piano Trio, a work they've played many times in concert, alongside youthful works by Enescu and Britten (see review on page 47). Recording plans are under discussion, although it is encouraging to hear that they are committed to exploring unusual repertoire. Messiaen's *Quatuor pour la fin du temps* will probably be next – do look out for it.

## GRAMOPHONE *Online*

The magazine is just the beginning. Visit [gramophone.co.uk](http://gramophone.co.uk) for ...

### Podcasts

This month on the *Gramophone* Podcast Editor Martin Cullingford meets guitarist Sharon Isbin, whose two new albums explore the versatility of her instrument. The first ('Affinity') includes contemporary music for guitar by Chris Brubeck, Leo Brouwer, Tan Dun and Richard Danielpour while the second album ('Strings for Peace') features sarod master Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Amaan and Ayaan Ali Bangash for a journey through the ragas and talas of North Indian classical music.



Sharon Isbin is a guest on the Gramophone Podcast

Also this month, James Jolly speaks to clarinettist Martin Fröst about his new recording of Vivaldi 'clarinet concertos', works created with the assistance of the composer and arranger Andreas Tarkmann from arias drawn from the composer's operas.

### Specialist Classical Chart

The Official Specialist Classical Chart Top 20 is now available on the *Gramophone* website. Updated every Friday, it is an excellent guide to new classical releases.



# GRAMOPHONE GUIDE TO ...

## Opera seria

**Richard Wigmore** explores the growth of the serious genre, from Vivadi to Rossini

There were tentative stirrings at the end of the 17th century. But it was in the early 18th that Italian *opera seria* ('serious opera') really got into its stride – though composers tended to prefer the term *dramma per musica*. From the 1720s that one-man libretto factory Pietro Metastasio (1698-1782) reigned supreme, producing libretti that were set by composers from Vivaldi, Handel and Hasse, via Gluck and Mozart (who both set his *La clemenza di Tito*), to Mercadante in the 1820s. 'Heroic' plots, drawn from history or myth, centred on amorous intrigue and dynastic power struggles, with the protagonists sanitised and idealised to flatter the amour-propre of the rulers in the audience. Structures, predicated on the alternation of continuo-accompanied recitative and *da capo* (ABA) arias, were strictly formalised. The Age of Enlightenment expected a happy ending, often involving one or more weddings. Handel's *Tamerlano* is a rare case of an *opera seria* where a sympathetic character – the Turkish Emperor Bajazet – dies.

Prime attractions for the elite audiences were the star castratos and prima donnas with their virtuoso techniques, exorbitant fees and temperaments to match. Tenors and basses, crucial to *opera buffa*, were typically confined to minor roles. Baroque opera seria reached its peak in the works Handel wrote for London in the 1720s and 1730s. His finest heroic operas, among them *Radamisto*, *Tamerlano*, *Giulio Cesare* and *Rodelinda*, largely adhere to the genre's conventions, in which, for instance, each scene climaxes in an 'exit aria'. But they transcend them through their inspired structural twists, depth of charactersation and dramatic power.

A sub-genre of *opera seria* was the 'magic opera', often drawing on episodes from Ariosto's epic *Orlando furioso*. The



Rossini's spectacular *Semiramide* is arguably opera seria's final masterpiece

two masterpieces here are Handel's *Orlando*, with its outlandish 'mad scene', and *Alcina*, whose portrait of the ultimately tragic sorceress rivals that of Cleopatra in psychological insight.

From the 1760s composers including Traetta, Jommelli and Gluck sought to reform the formality and increasingly extravagant vocal excesses of *opera seria*. Influenced by both French *tragédie lyrique* and *opera buffa*, they emphasised dramatic truth over virtuoso display. Structures became more fluid, with free use of chorus and ensembles. The finest fruits of Italian 'reform' opera are the Italian versions of Gluck's *Orfeo* and *Alceste*, and Mozart's two mature *opere serie*: *Idomeneo*, with its uniquely rich orchestral colouring, and the more ascetic *La clemenza di Tito*, where Metastasio's much-set libretto receives a modernising makeover.

By the early 19th century *opera seria*, like the castrato cult on which it had depended, was becoming outmoded. Yet it survived for a quarter of a century in the works of Simon Mayr, Ferdinando Paer, Mercadante and Rossini, whose spectacular *Semiramide* (1823) is arguably the genre's final masterpiece. **G**

## 78rpm piano recordings

A database of all 78rpm piano recordings is now available and searchable at the APR website: [aprrecordings.co.uk/apr78](http://aprrecordings.co.uk/apr78). This has been something of a labour of love for Mike Spring, the owner of APR, who has spent years compiling comprehensive information on all piano recordings (including concertos and chamber works with piano) originally issued on 78rpm discs, from the turn of the century to the 1950s, when they were gradually superseded by longer-playing records.

Various search criteria are available, from pianist, composer and work title, to more forensic details such as matrix number and recording location. If you want to know who made the first recording of Chopin's B minor Piano Sonata, it's an easy process to find the answer: Percy Grainger in 1925, six years before the first of Alfred Cortot's versions; Dinu Lipatti's famous 1947 recording was the sixth

Planoist	Composer	Work Name 1	Work Name 2	Label	Year
100	Chopin, Frédéric	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Columbia (UK)	1916
200	Chopin, Frédéric	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Victor	1923
300	Chopin, Frédéric	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Columbia (UK)	1925
400	Cortot, Alfred	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		HMV	1931
500	Cortot, Alfred	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		HMV	1933
600	Chopin, Frédéric	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Victor	1933
700	Chopin, Frédéric	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		HMV	1938
800	Rosenthal, Maria	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Victor	1938
900	Rosenthal, Maria	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Victor	1938
1000	Rosenthal, Maria	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Victor	1938
1100	Lipatti, Dinu	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Columbia (UK)	1947
1200	Lipatti, Dinu	Piano Sonata No 3 in B minor, Op 38		Columbia (UK)	1947

complete account on disc. The first recording of Balakirev's *Islamey* was made by Claudio Arrau (1928); the first of a Beethoven piano concerto was by Frederic Lamond (the *Emperor* in 1922). The complete discography of, say, Cortot is just a click away.

The 12,271 entries contain a wealth of information. The most recorded composer was Chopin – perhaps not surprising given the options available for recording complete pieces on a single side – and the most recorded work was his C sharp minor Waltz, Op 64 No 2. Beethoven's *Moonlight* Sonata was recorded 22 times before the Second World War (in addition to many recordings of just a single movement), the first of these by a certain W Meyrowitz in c1912, where we learn that the label Marathon had developed

a long-playing system that allowed a side of a 12" disc to play up to eight minutes of music, allowing the whole work to fit on two sides. Be warned – whole afternoons can disappear: it's endlessly fascinating.



# ARTISTS & *their* INSTRUMENTS

## *Bram van Sambeek* on taming his cherished 1970 Heckel bassoon

“I was familiar with this instrument years before I bought it. It was previously owned by Klaus Thunemann and then his student Sergio Azzolini – two of the most famous bassoonists, both of whom pursued solo careers. Thunemann is celebrated for his amazing sound; Azzolini, too, but also for his progressive approach to Baroque music. They’re both my heroes – I grew up hearing them live and listening to their recordings.

Then the opportunity came up for me to buy it ... You think, wow, this is a once-in-a-lifetime chance – but you can’t just buy something based on its reputation. Plus, as I like to joke, I understood why these players sold it: it’s not an easy instrument to play!

Its downside is its intonation – specifically, a few notes in the tenor range which you have to work at, to push up. But I’ve grown to love this imperfection – I’ve become attached to that particular ‘pushed’ sound, that quality of resistance. And there’s another benefit, too. I’ve played on ‘better’ instruments where the air pressure remains more constant and, as a result, when you play with other people and there’s a lot of sound around you, you can lose your orientation. With this instrument, though, it’s more connected to physical sensations in the body; the extra air pressure required means you know whether or not you’re in tune, even if you can’t hear yourself.

It was a long process to adjust to the instrument, but I think I’m now realising its full potential. In order to find a certain colour and at the same time play in tune, you must have a very flexible embouchure. I’ve now increased this flexibility far beyond what’s required for correct intonation, developing my own technique to create a more colourful tone overall. I can play extremely high, with a squeezed sound, even though on the bassoon it takes a lot of effort. To do this, I play the reed on my teeth, which means I can get a really penetrating sound without biting through my lips. This effect has been useful for my ‘rock’ career!



I believe my bassoon – a Heckel, the brand based in Germany – dates from 1970. It’s made from aged maple wood, and is rich ochre in colour. If you look closely, you’ll see how each owner found his own solution regarding the intonation problem because, as much as we all fell in love with its ‘gritty’ sound, we’ve all wanted to improve the instrument. Thunemann cut a piece out, which Azzolini then put back in! And I myself have done something quite drastic to it.

The Canadian bassoon maker Benson Bell suggested I replace 20cm of the bore, which had narrowed over the years. I didn’t dare, but he persuaded me, working day and night to have it ready before I flew home. The effect was like taking a sock out of the instrument.

When I play it, I imagine a smoky Scottish whisky – the sound isn’t clean but has a lovely depth to it. And this mature sound really suits the Mozart Concerto, a pinnacle of the repertoire. While this is essentially light, playful, naughty music, you don’t want it to sound shallow, and the grainy quality of my instrument helps to avoid this. The Weber Concerto is, by contrast, very operatic which suits the instrument’s tenor quality. And the Du Pay – an amazing discovery for me, composed for one of the Preumayr brothers who were way ahead of their time in terms of agility – is technically very demanding. We know these brothers were into playing extremely high notes, so I’ve inserted a high A flat – not very authentic, but hopefully the composer would have approved!”

*Bram van Sambeek’s new BIS recording of the Mozart, Weber and Du Puy bassoon concertos is reviewed on page 33*

## Classical: NEXT awards revealed

Classical: NEXT has named the recipients of its 2020 Innovation Awards, of which *Gramophone* is a media partner. Created to ‘place a spotlight on forward-thinking activities taking place around the world’, they were announced in an online ceremony. **Liza Lim** and the **Composing Women** programme at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music were acknowledged for ‘being the only higher-level composition programme for women demonstrating a sustained, strategic commitment to change’ and for representing ‘a successful model which could be – should be – adopted far and wide’. The Finland-based **Partones** company received an award ‘for addressing the urgent ecological problem and representing the future direction of instrument building’, while **Splendor Amsterdam** in the Netherlands (pictured) – a venue run by 50 musicians – was recognised ‘for showing great ability to survive and thrive in desperate times’.



## BBC Proms 2020 plans unveiled

The BBC Proms has announced that, due to Covid-19, this year it will instead offer daily broadcasts drawing on the festival’s archives. The eight weeks of evening programmes will begin on BBC Radio 3 on July 17, as the live broadcasts would have done, accompanied by an archive broadcast of a weekly Late Night Prom and a Monday lunchtime recital.

However, the festival still holds ambitions to ‘have musicians performing live at the Royal Albert Hall across the final two weeks of the season’, which would be broadcast live on BBC Radio 3, BBC Four and iPlayer, leading up to what organisers are describing as ‘a poignant and unique Last Night of the Proms’ on September 12. The details will be revealed nearer the time, based on the most up-to-date rules surrounding social distancing and public events and gatherings.

There are also plans for some live digital events, beginning with a First Night commission to be performed by all the BBC orchestras and BBC Singers, featuring more than 350 musicians as part of a ‘Grand Virtual Orchestra’ presenting ‘a mash-up of Beethoven’s symphonies’. David Pickard, Proms Director, said: ‘These are challenging times, but they show that we need music ... more than ever. It is not going to be the Proms as we know them, but the Proms as we need them.’



# ORCHESTRA *Insight ...*

## Seattle Symphony

Our monthly series telling the story behind an orchestra

**Founded** 1903

**Home** Benaroya Hall

**Music Director** Thomas Dausgaard

**Conductor Laureate** Gerard Schwarz

The foremost symphony orchestra of America's Pacific Northwest shares its hometown with some of the biggest names in tech and innovation. Not long ago your Microsoft Windows software package would come pre-loaded with the Seattle Symphony's account of the *Scherzo* from Beethoven's Symphony No 9. In the last decade, the orchestra has once again looked to the city to reinvent itself as an organisation powered by innovation and alive to the opportunities presented by technology. It has proved that the most robust modern orchestras are those that image themselves locally, not internationally.

The organisation had a choppy history until the centrepiece of the 20th century, when it reconstituted once and for all after years of complicated mergers and splits. The new Seattle Symphony coasted under a series of competent conductors until the colossal tenures of Milton Katims (1954-1976) and Gerard Schwarz (1985-2011), the latter fixing his ensemble a spectacular new home in Benaroya Hall and working hard to cultivate the ensemble's technique, but with methods that made him enemies and even prompted lawsuits. New leadership was long overdue when Ludovic Morlot arrived as Chief Conductor in 2011, the same year as President and CEO Simon Woods.

Change came quickly. Where Schwarz had focused on American composers of the early and mid-20th century (Hanson, Piston, Griffes and Schuman), Morlot explored works by living musicians from Seattle and even from within its orchestra. The



world took notice of John Luther Adams's *Become Ocean* – a Seattle Symphony commission whose recording won a Grammy, as did that of orchestral works by Henri Dutilleux on the in-house label Morlot established in 2014, Seattle Symphony Media. Dutilleux became a pet composer and a catalyst in Washington state: a means of lightening the sometimes heavy tone inherited from Schwarz, of getting the orchestra's musicians to listen differently to each other, and of leading the Benaroya Hall audience into accepting a more regular diet of atonal music.

That was done by clever juxtapositions, a practice that could have been designed to stimulate Thomas Dausgaard, who stepped up from Principal Guest Conductor to become Music Director in 2019, the year after the Seattle Symphony was voted *Gramophone's* Orchestra of the Year. The ensemble has initiated performances with Pearl Jam and Sir Mix-A-Lot (icons of Seattle's renowned pop music scene), established late-night concerts and even attracted the philanthropy of Taylor Swift. Dausgaard remains busy ensuring that the organisation's tagline 'Listen Boldly' is as relevant in the programme as it is in the performance. **Andrew Mellor**

**Visit Gramophone's Apple Music curator page for a playlist**

## Hera Hyesang Park signs to DG

Deutsche Grammophon has signed the soprano Hera Hyesang Park.

The 31-year-old South Korean's debut album will be released first in South Korea in November to coincide with a tour of the country. 'Creating my debut album for Deutsche Grammophon is proving to be a process of self-discovery,' she said. 'This recording will let me show who I am and share the music I love in the most direct and simple way possible.' DG has said that the programme will represent her 'lyric coloratura voice and understanding of her art' and be 'linked to key episodes in her life and career so far. She hopes this musical self-portrait will speak to a wide audience.'

Hera Hyesang Park's performances last year included Masetta in *La bohème* at the Komische Oper Berlin, and Rosina in *Il barbiere di Siviglia* at Glyndebourne; the previous year, she had performed at the New York Met Gala wearing a dress chosen for her by *Vogue* Editor-in-Chief Dame Anna Wintour.



'Musical self-portrait': debut album on DG

## Live broadcasts back underway

A number of organisations have launched series of live broadcasts in recent weeks, as venues have found ways to work within the slowly lifting restrictions placed upon performance. Starting on June 1, but running throughout the month, London's Wigmore Hall began a daily lunchtime series with a recital by pianist Stephen Hough, broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and the Wigmore website. The first work heard live from a UK concert hall in almost three months was Busoni's transcription of Bach's *Chaconne*, followed by Schumann's *Fantasie* and, for the encore, the Bach-Gounod *Ave Maria*.

Meanwhile, on May 30 the Basque National Orchestra joined those ensembles making an early return to collective music with a series of eight weekly concerts under its Principal Conductor Robert Trevino, to be broadcast live on Basque television and the orchestra's digital channels. Another orchestra broadcast series, 'Close up - at a distance' from the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra, comes live from the Grieghallen in Bergen throughout June, and is available for free from the orchestra's website (including, of course, its first appearance before an audience, mentioned on page 9). Other live concerts reaching audiences at home include those from the Philharmonie de Paris, the Berlin Philharmonic and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.



# FROM WHERE I SIT

Edward Seckerson on exploring classical music in lockdown – with a little help from the telephone



I'm writing this from lockdown (I never thought I'd write those words) where I am putting the finishing touches to a survey of Decca's bumper box of Karajan remasterings for BBC Radio 3's 'Record Review'. It will be a telephone encounter with presenter Andrew McGregor and that in itself lends a whole new dimension to the notion of phoning in one's performance. Andrew will be at home too, of course, though he won't be at the mercy of British Telecom but rather properly miked up in a makeshift studio by his BBC support team. By the time you read this you will know how reliable or otherwise our connection turned out to be.

But then again, in the early days of broadcasting it was the telephone – thanks to Alexander Graham Bell – that conveyed all manner of entertainment into people's homes. Subscribers (initially the better-off) would be provided with custom-made headsets via which they could access music and the spoken word across a wide range of disciplines. As early as 1881, live performances from Paris's two opera houses were relayed to a specially created stand at the Great Electrical Exhibition. The first live Covent Garden performances were transmitted in this way to private homes, gentlemen's clubs and hotels. But it was in Budapest, not Paris or London, that Telefon Hírmondó created what we would come to recognise as a fully functioning radio station with a daily schedule of news, views and music.

It's amazing how little known any of this is. I myself was amazed by the revelations when I presented a Radio 3 Sunday Feature entitled 'The Pleasure Telephone' back in 2011. Dubious though the title might sound (I like its capriciousness), this documentary put me in touch with a wide range of experts and archivists on the subject of early broadcasting and even spirited me to the stage of Paris's Opéra Comique where I could commune with Bizet over the impending premiere of *Carmen*. Imagine picking up the telephone and hearing that.

During lockdown I have been doing my listening on headphones. That's unusual for me as I prefer the ambience of a room and the space around my head when settling down for work or pleasure. But others in my building in Westminster (some of them MPs) have also been working from home and may or may not have appreciated thunderous reports of Mahler, Strauss, Shostakovich and so on seeping into the corridors. Nor would my partner – a teacher with pupils to cater for online – appreciate days and days of Herbert von Karajan's Viennese adventures, be it supersonic Strauss – *Also sprach Zarathustra* – or Holst's *The Planets* (two of my favourites from that era), or epic opera from Puccini to Rimsky-Korsakov's luxury upholstery of Mussorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (which I publicly dislike but privately adore).

Lockdown should be (and I'm sure is) a time for music enthusiasts to indulge their passion and trawl their record collections with impunity. But while it's grand to have more time privately to rediscover and to reevaluate, I for one desperately miss the shared experience and cannot wait to see you all again on the other side.

OPUS ARTE

NEW FROM GLYNDEBOURNE

**Massenet**  
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Danielle de Niese | Kate Lindsey | Lionel Lhote | Nina Minasyan  
Conductor John Wilson | Director Fiona Shaw  
London Philharmonic Orchestra | The Glyndebourne Chorus

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“A savvy modern-day makeover” *The Times*  
 “Cinders goes to the ball in fine voice” *Evening Standard*  
 “Enchanting and thought-provoking” *Classical Source*

**MOZART**  
**Die Zauberflöte**  
DAVID PORTILLO | CAROLINE WETTERGREEN | BJÖRN BÜRGER  
SOFIA FOMINA | JÖRG SCHNEIDER | BRINDLEY SHERATT | ALISON ROSE  
CONDUCTOR RYAN WIGGLESWORTH | DIRECTOR BARBE & DOUCET  
THE GLYNDEBOURNE CHORUS  
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# GRAMOPHONE

## CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2020

### *Orchestra of the Year*

The closure of our concert halls and the silencing of our orchestras is a stark reminder, by omission, of the magic of hearing a superb ensemble responding to an inspiring conductor. Now in its third year, our Orchestra of the Year Award celebrates not just this elusive chemistry but all the various national flavours and attitudes that make orchestral performance such a very special experience. We've selected 10 ensembles that have particularly impressed

us over the past year or so, and present them to you to cast your vote. With Apple Music we've created playlists for each group, as well as a regularly updated playlist featuring all 10. Have a listen and vote for the ensemble you think deserves the accolade 'Orchestra of the Year'. **James Jolly**

Listen to the recordings on Apple Music at [gramophone.co.uk/awards](https://gramophone.co.uk/awards) and cast your vote by September 7



Our Orchestras of the Year, in 2018 the Seattle SO with its then-Music Director Ludovic Morlot, and (right), in 2019, the Hong Kong Philharmonic and Jaap van Zweden

#### BBC Symphony Orchestra (UK)



Too often overshadowed by flashier London ensembles like the LSO or Philharmonia, the BBC's flagship orchestra can, on good form, stand alongside the best. Under Sakari Oramo, the BBC SO is in excellent shape and typically voracious in its appetite for a vast range of music: this year composers as different as Bliss, Schoenberg (providing superlative accompaniment to Jack Liebeck in the Violin Concerto) and Ethel Smyth provided the fare for some outstanding recordings. **Brahms. Schoenberg Violin Concertos** Liebeck; BBC SO / Gourlay (Orchid, 5/20) **Bliss** Mary of Magdala, etc Soloists; BBC SO & Chor / A Davis (Chandos, 12/19) **Smyth** Mass in D. The Wreckers - Overture Soloists; BBC SO & Chor / Oramo (Chandos, 11/19)

#### Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra (Norway)



Since 2015, this fine Norwegian orchestra, which can trace its roots back 250 years, has been conducted by Edward Gardner who, thanks to a relationship with Chandos, has been giving us a characteristically eclectic series of recordings. And such is the rapport between conductor and orchestra

that the very 'central' repertoire of Brahms symphonies has appeared. And impressive it is too, Andrew Farach-Colton finding himself won over by Gardner's way of 'making plain the tension between the composer's Classical sensibility and Romantic impulses'. A magnificent Elgar *Enigma* Variations from Gardner's predecessor Andrew Litton, and a superb Bruckner Sixth under Thomas Dausgaard merely add lustre to the Bergen Phil's wide-ranging catalogue.

**Brahms Symphonies Nos 1 & 3** Bergen PO / Gardner (Chandos, A/19)

**Bruckner Symphony No 6** Bergen PO / Dausgaard (BIS, 4/20)

**Elgar Enigma Variations Holst The Planets** Bergen PO / Litton (BIS, 9/19)

#### Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (Germany)



With a couple of name changes since its foundation in 1946 as the RIAS Symphonie-Orchester, this radio orchestra has featured on some notable conductors' CVs (Maazel, Chailly and Nagano all served as Chief Conductor). Now that job belongs to Robin Ticciati, and since 2017 he has developed a relationship that exudes mutual affection. They've given us some masterly recordings ranging from Debussy and Duruflé to Beethoven and Sibelius. And the sheer class of the DSO shines through when directed by guest conductors too.



**Beethoven. Sibelius** Violin Concertos Tetzlaff; DSO Berlin /Ticciati (Ondine, 10/19)  
**Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 5 Helmchen; DSO Berlin /Manze (Alpha, 12/19)  
**Debussy** Nocturnes **Duruflé** Requiem Soloists; Rundfunkchor Berlin;  
 DSO Berlin /Ticciati (Linn, A/19)

### City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra (UK)



Birmingham has become the launch pad for some pretty amazing careers – propelling Rattle to Berlin, Oramo to Stockholm and the BBC SO, and Nelsons to Boston and Leipzig. Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla, Chief Conductor since 2016, has won over public and orchestra alike, and for her first DG recording she championed the music of Mieczysław Weinberg with a style and conviction that, for David Fanning, made it ‘one of the most important symphonic releases of the year’.

**Schubert** Symphonies Nos 2 & 6, etc CBSO / Gardner (Chandos, 5/20)

**Weinberg** Symphonies Nos 2 & 21 CBSO / Gražinytė-Tyla (DG, 6/19)

### Freiburger Barockorchester (Germany)



One of Germany’s most consistently impressive period-instrument ensembles, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra has shown itself characteristically responsive to many different conductors’ approaches. In 2020, Beethoven looms large and, with René Jacobs, the ensemble gave us a thrilling recording of Beethoven’s *Leonore*, and with Pablo Heras-Casado – and Kristian Bezuidenhout – it’s been the piano concertos, electrifyingly done. Plus, the group’s own Concertmaster-Music Director Gottfried von der Goltz took on early Mozart symphonies, giving performances that, as David Threasher said, ‘make the now classic period-instrument set by the Academy of Ancient Music (L’Oiseau-Lyre) sound pale in comparison’.

**Beethoven** *Leonore* Sols; Freiburg Bar Orch / Jacobs (Harmonia Mundi, 2/20)

**Beethoven** Piano Concertos Nos 2 & 5 Bezuidenhout; Freiburg Bar Orch / Heras-Casado (Harmonia Mundi, 3/20)

**Mozart** ‘Youth Symphonies’ Freiburg Bar Orch / von der Goltz (Aparté, 2/20)

### Orchestre National de Lille (France)



A palpable spirit of renewal pervades everything this ensemble from France’s northern Pas de Calais region does. Founded in 1976 by Jean-Claude Casadesus, many of the then young players retired with him and, in 2016, Alexandre Bloch found himself with a largely new orchestra. And he’s been making waves with music-making of palpable vigour and freshness while retaining the ensemble’s innate ‘Frenchness’. Of its Chausson recording, Tim Ashley commented that the ‘playing is rich, both in sound and detail, the brass warm and burnished, the woodwind elegant and refined’. Clearly a partnership to watch ...

**Chausson** Symphony. *Poème de l’amour et de la mer* Gens; Orch Nat de Lille / Bloch (Alpha, 6/19)

**Ravel** *La valse*. *Rapsodie espagnole* **Attahir** Adh-Dhor Orch Nat de Lille / Bloch (Alpha)

**‘Belle Époque’** Van Wauwe; Orch Nat de Lille / Bloch (Pentatone, 11/19)

### Los Angeles Philharmonic (USA)

The Los Angeles Philharmonic, just turned 100 and conducted by the charismatic Gustavo Dudamel since 2009, is flying high. A catholic repertoire with an enlightened attitude



to new music (instigated by Dudamel’s predecessor Esa-Pekka Salonen) keeps the ensemble consistently flexible and vibrant. Whether in the ‘wondrous effects’ (Andrew Farach-Colton) of Andrew Norman’s *Sustain* or the unrestrained bravura of John Adams’s *Must The Devil Have All the Good Tunes?*; whether partnering Yuja Wang with panache or turning the spotlight on the city’s greatest export, the movies, with the music of John Williams, the LA Phil just seems to get it right. It is, surely, one of the US’s finest ensembles today.

**Adams** *Must The Devil Have All the Good Tunes?* Wang; LA Phil / Dudamel (DG, 6/20)

**Norman** *Sustain* LA Phil / Dudamel (DG, 5/19)

**‘Celebrating John Williams’** LA Phil / Dudamel (DG, 6/19)

### musicAeterna (Russia)



musicAeterna, now relocated from Perm to St Petersburg, is the personal, hand-picked instrument of the maverick maestro Teodor Currentzis. Of its recent Beethoven Fifth, Andrew Farach-Colton remarked that Currentzis’s musicians ‘play with astonishing rhythmic security and poise, revealing how much care has been lavished on detail’. Like John Eliot Gardiner’s Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, this is an ensemble that amplifies its conductor’s musical personality and does so with often thrilling results.

**Beethoven** Symphony No 5 musicAeterna / Currentzis (Sony Classical, 4/20)

### NHK Symphony Orchestra, Tokyo (Japan)



As he approaches his final seasons after five years in charge of this venerable Japanese orchestra (he steps down in 2022), Paavo Järvi – ever his father’s son – can look back with satisfaction that he has raised the bar in both quality of playing and appetite for new repertoire. These musicians naturally love the core Austro-German-Russian repertoire and give wonderfully in the music of, say, Bruckner, Richard Strauss and Rachmaninov, but they also play their own composers exquisitely as they proved in an album of orchestral works by Takemitsu. And they do make a particularly lovely sound!

**R Strauss** *Don Quixote* etc Mørk; NHK SO / P Järvi (RCA Red Seal)

**Takemitsu** Orchestral works NHK SO / P Järvi (RCA Red Seal)

### Philadelphia Orchestra (USA)



Under the baton of Yannick Nézet-Séguin, the Philadelphia Orchestra, once synonymous with the music of Rachmaninov, has regained its lustre. Partnering Daniil Trifonov in the piano concertos, the ensemble caught David Fanning’s ear ‘with plenty of old-fashioned portamento and plushly upholstered texturing’ and, taking the corners at Trifonov’s breakneck speeds, proved that virtuosity also comes easily. A Mahler Eighth, recorded in concert early in Nézet-Séguin’s reign, had Edward Seckerson responding to ‘the honeyed portamento of the Philadelphia strings’.

**Rachmaninov** Piano Concerto Nos 1 & 3 etc Trifonov; Philadelphia / Nézet-Séguin (DG, 11/19)

**Mahler** Symphony No 8 Soloists; Philadelphia / Nézet-Séguin (DG, 4/20)

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# BARBIROLLI

## *A life in recordings*

Marking 50 years since the conductor's death, **Andrew Farach-Colton** chooses 10 momentous releases that trace a route through his life and celebrate his musicality, integrity and humanity

**S**ir John Barbirolli was just 11 when he took his cello into a London studio to cut his first recordings in October 1911. In the nearly 60 years that remained to him, he was in the studio frequently, assembling a catalogue so vast that it covers nearly every aspect of his professional life, often in fine detail. Although the 10 records that follow are all superb examples of his art, they're not meant solely to be my personal nominations for Barbirolli's Best. Rather, I've aimed to provide a bird's-eye view of his career's variegated terrain while highlighting a few of its artistic peaks. I can't say this made the selection process any less agonising, but I tried to be guided by a sense of responsibility to the conductor's legacy. JB has been gone for a half-century now, but his innate musicality, generous spirit and profound humanity shine as bright as ever in his finest recordings.

**Debussy: Danse sacrée; Danse profane (rec 1927)**  
**Ethel Bartlett *pf* National Gramophonic Society**  
**Chamber Orchestra (Barbirolli Society)**

Barbirolli was immersed in music from infancy. His father and paternal grandfather were violinists who'd played in the premiere of Verdi's *Otello* at La Scala, Milan, and later (before Barbirolli's birth) made their way to London to find work in theatre orchestras. Young Giovanni Battista (he later anglicised his name) started on the violin but soon switched to the cello. He practised for hours each day and spent his spare time studying scores. By age 16, he was the youngest player in Henry Wood's Queen's Hall Orchestra, and aged 18 he was in the cello section of the LSO when Elgar conducted the first performance of his Cello Concerto. But he was determined to conduct, and after the war he began forming his own ensembles in order to make his dream a reality.

He made his first recordings as conductor in 1927 under the auspices of the National Gramophonic Society, leading a string orchestra he'd founded a few years earlier (the society's notes in *Gramophone* February 1927 give the backstory). The repertoire was definitely off the beaten track: Debussy, Delius, Elgar, Marcello and Warlock. Although Debussy and Ravel don't figure prominently in his discography, both composers were near to his heart. He'd performed Ravel's String Quartet in 1916 while still a student at the Royal Academy of Music (causing an outcry from some of the faculty, who believed the music unsuitable for presentation in an academic setting) and played Debussy's Cello Sonata at a 1917 Aeolian Hall recital. Now, as a conductor, he was making one of the first recordings of Debussy's 1904 works *Danse sacrée* and *Danse profane* for harp and strings.

A piano replaces the harp here (surely because it was easier to capture on record), and the sound is dim by modern standards, but the performance itself is remarkable for its poise, polish and rapt atmosphere. The delicacy of the string tone and the chastely expressive use of portamentos are telling. To the end of his career, Barbirolli was meticulous about marking string parts with bowings and other details, and if this isn't yet the richly supple, finely shaded 'Barbirolli sound' he'd soon bring to the string section of nearly every orchestra he conducted, it's well on its way.

**Chopin: Piano Concerto No 2 (rec 1935)**  
**Alfred Cortot *pf* Unnamed orchestra (Naxos, 5/39)**

At the time Barbirolli made his first orchestral recordings, he was busy with the British National Opera Company, leading productions all over England. In December 1927 he made his LSO conducting debut, taking over at short notice for an indisposed Sir Thomas Beecham (Elgar's Second Symphony was on the programme, and Barbirolli had just days to learn it). The concert's success led immediately to a contract with HMV, and soon Barbirolli was recording arias and concertos with Chaliapin, Gigli, Heifetz, Kreisler, Melchior, Rubinstein, Schnabel and other leading soloists of the day. From this period's embarrassment of riches, I've selected Chopin's F minor Piano Concerto with Cortot, in part because Barbirolli makes such an unusually satisfying meal of the orchestral part, but also as it so vividly illustrates the conductor's technical prowess. Cortot plays with copious rubato, and Barbirolli has the orchestra following his every swell and sigh.

**Sibelius: Symphony No 2 (rec 1940)**  
**New York Philharmonic-Symphony Orchestra (Sony, 8/99)**

One segment of Barbirolli's career sadly not documented on records is his tenure as principal conductor of the Scottish Orchestra (now the RSNO) from 1933 to 1936 – especially as it presages his ferocious work rebuilding the Hallé Orchestra. He brought a starry array of soloists to the north, which, together with his work for HMV, led to word getting back to the American impresario Arthur Judson, who was searching for a conductor to replace Arturo Toscanini at the New York Philharmonic-Symphony Society. Barbirolli was a highly unlikely choice, given his youth, relative inexperience and lack of name recognition, but his respectful collegiality – a sea change from having to deal with an explosive Toscanini – and thorough musicianship quickly won over the orchestra (known as 'Murder Incorporated' for its merciless treatment





Top: with Vaughan Williams; above: with the Hallé at the 1952 Cheltenham Festival

of conductors). Some critics remained intransigent and maintained that orchestral standards declined under his watch. A series of discs for Columbia and various live broadcast recordings tell a different story, however. This Sibelius Second, for instance, is white hot. Barbirolli was a devoted Sibelian and would record this symphony three more times, including an acclaimed 1962 account with the RPO; but I find this brilliantly articulate interpretation even more thrilling, and from the first pulsating bars the New York strings exhibit that inimitable Barbirolli sound, not just in terms of tonal richness but also in their attention to details of dynamics and articulation.

### **Bax: Symphony No 3 (rec 1943-44)**

**Hallé Orchestra** (Warner, 2/44)

There was true affection between Barbirolli and New York Philharmonic-Symphony musicians, but the Second World War intensified Barbirolli's desire to return home, so when he received an invitation to take the helm at the Hallé – one of Britain's oldest permanent orchestras – he felt it impossible to resist. What he discovered when he arrived in Manchester in June 1943, however, was a shambles at best, and he had to rebuild the orchestra almost entirely from scratch. 'I had to find the "slightly maimed",' he later recalled. 'It didn't matter if they had flat feet as long as they had straight fingers.' How astonishing, then, to hear the Hallé's confident and accomplished performance of Bax's broodingly complex Third Symphony, recorded a mere seven months after his arrival. Barbirolli's ardent championship of British music was nothing new. He had a vibrant patriotic streak and a keen sense of duty to Britain's musical past and present – Bax's *The Tale the Pine-Trees Knew* was the centrepiece of his New York

Philharmonic-Symphony debut, for example. In retrospect, it's clear that under his leadership the Hallé was already well on its way to becoming a guiding light of the nation's musical culture.

### **Vaughan Williams: Symphony No 8 (rec 1956)**

**Hallé Orchestra** (Naxos, 2/59)

Barbirolli was a friend to many composers, yet his relationship with Vaughan Williams was one of special connections. As early as 1925, as part of the Music Society Quartet, Barbirolli played and recorded the *Phantasy Quintet*, and as time went on he gradually added most of the orchestral works to his repertoire. He conducted the suite from the ballet *Job* in his first New York concerts, and later brought *A London Symphony* and the *Pastoral Symphony* to audiences there. With the Hallé, Vaughan Williams's music became even more of a staple, both in concert and on records. There's an ardent, touchingly plaintive Fifth from 1944 (recorded just a month after Bax's Third, in fact); it's a little rough-hewn when heard alongside his radiant 1962 account with the Philharmonia, but this ruggedness is part of its charm. Then there's the 1957 *A London Symphony*, one of Barbirolli and the Hallé's most magical recordings, and close to perfection in terms of both atmosphere and dramatic trenchancy. It seems more apt, however, to give the palm to this kaleidoscopic and still unrivalled reading of the Eighth, as the work was dedicated to Barbirolli – 'Glorious John', as Vaughan Williams called him, for the admiration was reciprocal. Awarding the conductor with the Gold Medal of the Royal Philharmonic Society in 1950, the composer described him as 'one of those wizards who can take the dry bones of crotchets and quavers and breathe into them the breath of life'.

### **Brahms: Symphony No 2 (rec 1959)**

**Boston Symphony Orchestra** (VAI DVD)

It's one thing to hear Barbirolli's music-making and quite another to see him in action. He was exceptionally graceful on the podium, and some sceptical critics (mistakenly) considered his elegant baton technique to be a little too slick. In truth, he was proud of his natural ability to communicate through gesture, and firmly believed that conductors were born and not made. Watching this grainy broadcast of a BSO television broadcast, one can appreciate the expressive fluidity of his

*In the Boston SO film, one sees him in a delicate dance, leading and then stepping back to let the orchestra play*

movements: those smooth, lateral motions, as if he were bowing an invisible violin to elicit legato phrasing; or the way he jackhammers with his fists to get that *ben marcato* quality Brahms asks for. And throughout, one sees him in a delicate dance, leading and then stepping back to let the orchestra play – an equilibrium that's only possible if the musicians have complete confidence in their conductor.

Brahms's Second was one of Barbirolli's signature works, and he knew exactly what the composer wanted. Still, these were his very first concerts with the BSO, and it's remarkable how warmly responsive they are to him – indeed, at the concert's end they applaud and cheer him as loudly as the audience does. The performance was part of a tour of US orchestras Barbirolli undertook after reducing some of his responsibilities with the Hallé, stepping down a rung from permanent conductor to conductor-in-chief. This gave him time not only to tour but also





With Monteux and Munch in Boston, where Barbirolli conducted in 1959 and 1964; and, right, with Janet Baker and Peter Pears at Abbey Road Studios, London, in the 1960s

to take on the music directorship of the Houston Symphony, with whom he'd established an instant rapport during a 1960 visit. Sadly, although Barbirolli remained with the Texas orchestra until 1967, they made no recordings together.

### **Elgar: The Dream of Gerontius (rec 1964)**

**Janet Baker** *mez* **Richard Lewis** *ten* **Kim Borg** *bass*  
**Hallé Orchestra** (Warner, 10/65)

Barbirolli was a loyal friend to Elgar long before the two men met, and I believe it's not far-fetched to assert that no other composer's music meant quite so much to him. How, then, to choose a single recording out of the dozens that represent a lifetime's worth of fierce devotion? The choice is especially complicated as Barbirolli's Elgar has special significance for me. It was through the conductor's passionately patient recordings of the *Enigma* Variations and the First Symphony with the Philharmonia that I first fell under the music's spell – and fell hard. A 1966 *Sospiri* with the strings of the New Philharmonia is perhaps the most nobly cathartic five minutes of music I know (Barbirolli's friend and biographer Michael Kennedy, who knew that the conductor, like Elgar, suffered from severe bouts of depression, heard in this recording 'a hint of what it was like to peer into the abyss of gloom'). And I don't think any conductor (including Elgar himself) has plumbed the depths of *Falstaff* with such courageous compassion.

## *Barbirolli's recording of The Dream of Gerontius stands as a burning testament to his steadfast faith in Elgar's genius*

Barbirolli's recording of *The Dream of Gerontius* has significant flaws. Richard Lewis is not in his best voice as Gerontius, and while Finnish bass Kim Borg has the Stygian tone the conductor clearly felt was right for the Priest and the Angel of the Agony, his English diction is distractingly unidiomatic. Yet the intensity never slackens for a moment, reflecting Barbirolli's indelible experience playing the work under the composer's direction at the 1920 Three Choirs Festival, as well as his conviction that Elgar composed it 'in a constant white heat of inspiration'. A devout Catholic, Barbirolli wrote to a friend after the sessions that he wanted to leave this recording 'as a kind of testament to my faith'; the recording stands, too, as a burning testament to his steadfast faith in Elgar's genius.

### **Puccini: Madama Butterfly (rec 1966)**

**Renata Scott** *sop* **Carlo Bergonzi** *ten* *et al*

**Rome Opera House Chorus and Orchestra** (Warner, 9/67)

Although opera was a primary component of Barbirolli's career at its outset (first with the British National Opera Company, and then, beginning in 1928, at Covent Garden), there was precious little opera in his musical diet between 1937 and 1951, when he finally returned to the Royal Opera House. A distantly miked live recording of *Aida* from 1953 (with Maria Callas in terrific form) gives an inkling of the nuanced playing he drew from the ROH orchestra, and the performance itself is notable for its unwavering lyricism. Even the Triumphal March has a songlike quality. Odd, then, that he didn't make his first studio recording of an opera until 1965: a sincerely felt yet slightly too grand *Dido and Aeneas* with Victoria de los Angeles. (Purcell and the earlier school of English composers had always been in his repertoire, usually in his own full-throated orchestral arrangements.) The following year, he flew to Rome to record *Madama Butterfly*, winning over the jaded musicians of the city's opera house orchestra and inspiring them to rehearse Puccini's well-worn score in depth. The resulting recording is exquisitely detailed. Barbirolli reportedly spent a great deal of time on the connecting scenes and passages – 'The most difficult parts in *Butterfly* are the ones nobody notices,' he said – and this gives his reading a rare richness of incident that adds both weight and impetus to the opera's narrative trajectory.

### **Mahler: Symphony No 6 (rec 1967)**

**New Philharmonia** (Warner, 7/68)

It's possible that Barbirolli found his path to Mahler working with contralto Kathleen Ferrier. They often performed *Kindertotenlieder* and *Das Lied von der Erde* – a splotchy sounding 1952 broadcast recording (now on APR) serves as a poignant memento of their special relationship – and it was only following her untimely death in 1953 that he began adding the symphonies to his repertoire. He said it took him a full year to properly learn a Mahler score – this, of course, included meticulous marking of the orchestral parts. He recorded four of the symphonies in the studio, including acclaimed accounts of Nos 5 and 9; various live broadcast performances of all but the Eighth have been issued over the past few decades. I felt some responsibility to plump for the Ninth (1964) as the emblematic Barbirolli Mahler recording, not only for its unique poetic intensity but also as it's an important milestone in his long relationship with the Berlin Philharmonic – following glowingly received performances, the Berliners themselves



invited him to make the record, and they hadn't recorded with a British conductor in more than a quarter-century. But surely the Sixth with the New Philharmonia is the most daring of his Mahler interpretations, and I still remember my first encounter with it: the slow, dogged tread of the opening movement holding me fast in its grip, and the aching tenderness of the *Andante moderato* as devastating in its own way as the symphony's catastrophic conclusion. No matter how many times I've heard it since, it never fails to land an emotional punch of disorientating force.

**Delius: Brigg Fair; Appalachia (rec 1970)**  
**Alun Jenkins bar Ambrosian Singers,**  
**Hallé Orchestra (Warner, 2/71)**


Delius's music had been in Barbirolli's repertoire from his days as a professional cellist, and in 1928, fresh from the success of his surprise LSO debut, he conducted a broadcast of the Violin Concerto with Albert Sammons as soloist. When a letter of sincere appreciation from the composer arrived shortly after, he hesitated before opening it – as he recalled: 'I loved this music so much and if Delius himself didn't like what I'd done I thought I'd better give up.'

My own introduction to Delius's music came through Beecham's celebrated stereo recordings, but it was not until I heard Barbirolli's some years later that I truly fell in love, and

*His Delius becomes a psychological study: memory sparks a sunset glow of nostalgia – and a hint of something more sinister*

my first head-over-heels swoon was for this *Brigg Fair*. Beecham makes the music suavely rapturous, a gorgeous pastoral scene painted with colour and finesse but one in which I can discern no human figures. Barbirolli, on the other hand, transforms these variations into a psychological study where memory sparks a sunset glow of nostalgia, longing and – in those sinuous woodwind lines – perhaps a hint of something more sinister, too. His way with *Appalachia* (the coupling on my original LP) is perhaps more impressive still, for he somehow gives shape and direction to this 40-minute work, sustaining a heady atmosphere of wistful ecstasy from beginning to end. I can't think of a better example of his mastery of large-scale structure.

### MUSIC MATTERS - EVEN AT THE END

Barbirolli, like many conductors before and after him, was a workaholic, and his health began to deteriorate by the time he was in his mid-sixties. In addition to suffering from clinical depression, he had arteriosclerosis and his medications led to regular blackouts. Still, he continued to run himself ragged, and just two weeks after leading the Delius sessions in mid-July 1970, he died. Yet, although he was physically debilitated, these performances convey as well as any a sense of how dearly he valued lyricism over flash, and how resolutely he refused to compromise or bow to convention. 'Music mattered to him more than anything in life – in the end more than life itself,' Kennedy wrote in the epilogue to his biography. How lucky we are, then, to have these records where his spirit survives in all its wondrously perfect imperfection. 



With Hallé concertmaster Martin Milner and producer Suvi Raj Grubb during the Delius sessions, July 17, 1970

*Sony's new Barbirolli box-set is now available; Warner's new box-set is due for release on July 19, while three more anniversary recordings, all with the Hallé, are due for release on the Barbirolli Society label on June 26*



Conducting the Hallé on February 14, 1953 – 10 years after he rebuilt the orchestra

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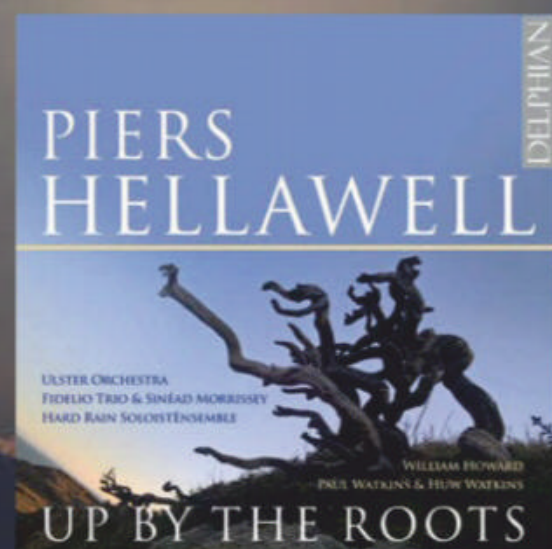
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# THE BEETHOVEN CONNECTION

For Beethoven year, Jean-Efflam Bavouzet is embarking on a three-volume project exploring the composer's contemporaries, starting with some unusual sonatas, discovers **Michelle Assay**

**'N**o need to run,' I shout in French as I see Jean-Efflam Bavouzet flying down the stairs of the Royal Northern College of Music. He's meeting me there after two full days of masterclasses, but shows not the slightest sign of fatigue: 'I love teaching; I always say I'll stop learning the day I stop teaching.'

The first thing that strikes me is Bavouzet's sheer energy. It seems to be contagious, to judge from my embarrassingly shrill voice as I listen back to the recording of our conversation and my apparent eagerness to get a word in edgeways. First he tries to solve the enigma of my origins and comes up with Lebanon. 'Good guess, but no, it's Iran,' I say, triumphantly. 'I wasn't far off, then!' he exclaims, and then asks about Armenians in Iran. I tell him that my own

piano teacher was Armenian and that for me Turkish coffee was always Armenian coffee. He tells me that he has

Armenian background on his mother's side and that when he first met Yuri Simonov, the conductor indeed asked him if he was Armenian. The context of the story is one of Bavouzet's all-time favourite works, Prokofiev's Fifth Concerto, and his success in convincing an initially sceptical Simonov of the greatness of the piece. 'It's not a concerto that you can come away and hum ... yet its power of imagination is incredible; I'm thinking of this moment with two bassoons before the coda; it's one of the most magical moments in Prokofiev.'

We turn to other concertos that have remained in the shadow of their more popular siblings, such as Rachmaninov's Fourth. I mention that I first heard Bavouzet live when he performed Rachmaninov's Second under Ashkenazy in Manchester in 2014. 'This was a bet with Vova [Ashkenazy]. I told him I had never played a Rachmaninov concerto but that I'd love to.' Six months later he got an invitation to play the Second Concerto in Nottingham and Manchester, with Ashkenazy and the Philharmonia. 'But did you know that what you heard was my very first Rachmaninov ever, with just half an hour of rehearsal? It's a great piece but in order to feel comfortable one should start learning it at the age of 17.'

We talk more about teaching, and he insists that the art of pedagogy is to give to the pupil the necessary 'keys' in order to realise their own vision of a piece. I mention Horowitz's pupils telling me that he never played for them. Bavouzet tells me that during Horowitz's visit to Paris in 1985, he was working on Schumann's F minor Sonata, which he had discovered only through Horowitz's recording. 'When I played it for Horowitz, he quickly noted that I was under his influence. "Don't try to imitate me," the maestro told me.' But this would quickly become a story of missed connections. Horowitz told the young

Bavouzet to contact him when next in New York, which he duly did during his visit for his US debut in 1987, but received no response. 'Typical of celebrities,' I observe. 'No, there's more,' he says. 'In 1996 I moved from my flat. At that time my mail had been delivered under the door as we had no mailbox. There was a carpet by the door under which was a handful of letters I hadn't noticed, among them an invitation from Horowitz's secretary. Of course by then the maestro was no more.'

There's always something touching about a star pianist acknowledging the role of his teachers and mentors. For Bavouzet there is first and foremost his Conservatoire teacher, Pierre Sancan. He wants me to announce a forthcoming project (concert and recording) with Yan Pascal Tortelier: 'a sort of

*'There were some letters I hadn't noticed, including an invitation from Horowitz's secretary. By then the maestro was no more'*

portrait of Pierre' including his Sonatine for Flute (Sancan's best-known work), a piano concerto, some orchestral works and a piano miniature – 'absolument adorable, but virtuosic ...

His is a very post-Ravelian musical language, at the opposite extreme from Messiaen and the dodecaphonists. His music is tonal but with added spices. Sancan was also one of the first who accepted, welcomed and encouraged jazz, at a time when jazz was considered as music that *salit l'âme* [pollutes the soul]. On a pianistic level, Bavouzet praises Sancan as the first teacher in France whose pupils – such as Michel Béroff, Jean-Bernard Pommier and Jean-Philippe Collard – would play and record the 'athletic' piano concertos such as those by Rachmaninov, Prokofiev and Bartók. 'At a time when the French school of piano-playing was still obsessed with *jeu perlé* and moving the hands without engaging the rest of the body, Sancan promoted a hybrid approach.'

Then there is Zoltán Kocsis: 'This man was one of the most genius musicians of our time. The dozen concerts we did together on two pianos back in 1995 changed my life. I could write a book on him.' Another name Bavouzet often mentions, and always with great admiration, is Georg Solti. 'He was the person who really taught me about opera as an inspiration for piano-playing. Working on Mozart concertos with him, I remember he had only two pieces of advice: sing, and play in tempo. The correlation between making the instrument sing yet not losing the tempo is very hard; obviously I was either playing like a machine or out of tempo.' He admits that what has been most effective in his operatic approach to piano-playing has been his immersion in the Mozart concertos (he's in the process of recording all 27 with the Manchester Camerata). 'That's why with Gábor Takács-Nagy [the Camerata's principal conductor] we decided to programme concertos with opera overtures composed around the same time. Apart from the operas





Performing Mozart concertos with Manchester Camerata under Gábor Takács-Nagy: immersing himself in these works has honed his operatic approach to piano-playing

themselves, the closest Mozart gets to the world of opera which he so much adored is in his concertos, where the piano has the advantage of being both male and female protagonists.'

I suggest that Bavouzet's operatic approach also comes through in his latest project, 'The Beethoven Connection', a three-volume series for solo piano dedicated to works by some of Beethoven's lesser-known contemporaries; the first instalment, of sonatas by Clementi, Dussek, Hummel and Wölfl, has just been released). 'Such an unusual repertoire, no?

But it shouldn't be; all of these composers were incredibly famous during their own time.' And yet Bavouzet doesn't jump on the bandwagon of championing neglected composers and trying to prove

that the canon should be rewritten. Instead his goal is 'to show how Beethoven, among these composers, stands out'. He uses the analogy of a mountain range: 'You never have gigantic mountains forming from a flat environment. And if a mountain looks as high [as Beethoven], then it's because it's surrounded by other lesser albeit still impressive mountains.'

So what is it about Beethoven that makes him seem so Himalayan? 'It's the combination of three absolutely crucial aspects,' says Bavouzet, whose critically acclaimed survey, completed in 2016, makes him, he says, only the eighth French pianist ever to have recorded the complete Beethoven sonatas. 'First, architecture.' He takes the example of the two-movement F major Sonata, Op 54. 'It's a piece composed to show how the concept of contrasts can be explored to its limits: not only two

*'If a mountain looks as gigantic as Beethoven, it's because it's surrounded by lesser albeit still impressive mountains'*

contrasting movements, but even such a sophisticated idea that the contrast to contrast is no contrast, which is the case with the second movement compared to the first.' He chooses 'virtuosity' as the second contributing component: 'the desire to innovate and do things in a new way; one could make a whole thesis of the left-hand accompaniment of his sonatas, but this is a virtuosity that is hidden ... And the third aspect is expression, poetry, all that has to do with atmosphere and individuality.'

For Bavouzet, then, Beethoven requires his performer to be

at once a great architect, a virtuoso and a poet. For a different example, he cites Debussy: 'The impression from hearing a great Debussyist shouldn't be that the performer is a great

architect; [rather that] you come away and think you've heard a great poet of the piano. Even if the music is structurally highly sophisticated, it gives the illusion of a book of sketches. I'd like to compare Debussy's music to a fantastic dream, after which you wake up feeling and knowing you have had a wonderfully beautiful dream, but if someone asked you what it was about you'd have to say you don't remember. At the end, Debussy's music should evaporate.'

Not so Beethoven. 'He transcends the idea of beauty,' says Bavouzet, demonstrating the repeated chords signalling the beginning of the finale of the *Appassionata*. 'This is not supposed to sound nice. This is a protest, rage, an outcry. You would never find anything like that in Hummel, for instance.' Or indeed Dussek, 'who deliberately wrote things to please the



audience, especially in this country [England]'. There are nevertheless common musical features between these composers, and sometimes even with Beethoven himself. With the help of a bonus track on his new album, Bavouzet illustrates passages such as chromatic scales in both hands, which seem to have been a common tool for moments of dramatic intensity across all these composers. But 200 years after Beethoven, having experienced the harmonic complexities in Liszt and Bartók, for instance, the chromatic scale can scarcely have the same effect? 'It's our duty as 21st-century musicians to go to the core of the music and recreate this same impact, the same shock that the work would have had on the audience that heard it for the first time. In other words we have to do exactly the reverse of the composition process.' This needs some explanation. For Bavouzet, once a composer has had an initial inspiration from a core idea he can create a whole work, which is then

transmitted to the performer through the musical text. When the performer first reads this text, 'sometimes it's difficult and you have to spend hours to figure out how to play a couple of bars'; but the further the musician 'digs in' the closer they get to uncovering that initial 'illumination'. And even then, he says, 'it is only a speculation, but you have to be convinced that you have touched the core of the music. Otherwise, you cannot be convincing to your audience.' He remembers when he first heard Paul Badura-Skoda playing Beethoven's Concerto No 1 and how in the finale he created such an atmosphere of joy that the whole of the Champs-Élysées Theatre burst into laughter. 'This is exactly what I mean by recreating the initial impact, to be able to make the audience laugh for joy 200 years after a piece is composed.' (And this is why Bavouzet is dedicating his forthcoming Beethoven concerto cycle with the Swedish CO to Badura-Skoda.)

Thinking about the shock of initial impact, we go on to his choice of instrument for the sonatas, via another one of the composers featuring on the disc, Joseph Wölfl (1773-1812), whose name I have to admit I had never come across until now. 'Most people in the music world have never heard of him either, but he was Beethoven's rival; they even had improvisation duels.' Bavouzet has chosen to record Wölfl's Sonata Op 33 No 3, a marvellously charming piece with a first movement that could have easily been composed by Mozart. 'But what we should not take for granted is that the instrument itself came a long way from the time of Mozart to that of Beethoven.'



Recording Vol 1 of 'The Beethoven Connection' at Potton Hall in December 2019

*'Most people in the music world haven't heard of Wölfl, but he was Beethoven's rival: they even had improvisation duels'*

skipping the coda the first time and only playing it the second time. 'I was in unknown territory, and this was just my instinct, but I was encouraged by the expert to trust my intuition.' In the current post-authenticity world, Bavouzet is not interested in restrictions but in ways of exploring and nuancing the sound stylistically for each composer. 'I explain to the producer my vision of the sound, and we find solutions to recreate it, such as taking the lid off when I want a more percussive sound.'

This leads us to the practicalities of conducting Beethoven's concertos from the piano, as he has done with his new concertos recording, due for release in September. He shows me a photo of his

preferred layout, including the lidless piano. 'You can certainly achieve greater results in less time when you play a concerto with a conductor. Otherwise, you need a lot more rehearsal time with the orchestra. On the other hand, by having no one to rely on, orchestral musicians are much more engaged; there is a direct communication, and the sense of give and take is greater, as there is no intermediary between the soloist and the orchestra. Not that you can't have a fantastic dialogue with an orchestra when there's a conductor present – I've had many experiences of that. But there's a great pleasure in directly facing the musicians and playing for them, with them, against them; it's a total fusion, provided you have enough time for rehearsals.' (I can sense the Philharmonia experience rankling.)

Then there is the flexibility in rhythm. He takes the example of Beethoven's Fourth, which he considers the first truly

Bavouzet is interested in hearing how period instruments sound, but not in playing them. His instrument of choice for the past few years is a Yamaha CFX prototype which he uses for everything, from Haydn to Beethoven. 'I take information about their sound world and how I can recreate that ... But just because you're playing on an authentic instrument doesn't mean that you have an authentic sound.' He has great respect for musicians of the early-instrument Baroque movement, such as Gustav Leonhardt, René Jacobs and Nikolaus Harnoncourt. 'All of them have the same attitude: be as knowledgeable as possible, know absolutely everything there is about the score, [but only] in order to be free.'

From all this, do I deduce that he is very interested in scholarship? 'Yes, but in the end you need to also trust your taste and intuition.' He tells me how he shared with László Somfai, the Haydn scholar, his solution for dealing with double repeats in Haydn by





Conducting Beethoven from the piano with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra: 'I managed to make the orchestra move with me'

Romantic concerto: 'This is a piece that you cannot play by keeping the beat [steady]. It doesn't sound right, because everything has too much meaning, too great a tension to build and to release. And to make that appear you need to have a certain flexibility in tempi. We can only speculate, and one of the first questions I'd ask if I had Beethoven on the phone



Intense workload: Bavouzet has six discs out in 2020, but loves the recording process

would be how short the staccatos at the opening of the second movement should be.' He realises his vision for this movement may not appeal to all, that 'some may say it's too fast'. But it's a risk he's willing to take: 'It should sound terrifying, uncompromising, but it has to have a quality of declamation too.' He's happy with the result: 'I managed to make the orchestra move with me, using my inexperienced conducting skills.'


Might he ever venture into being a full-time conductor? 'Conductors represent an enormous field, ranging from the total charlatan to the ultimate in music-making, and the entire range in between.' I'd be dying to know whom Bavouzet would place in the first category, but instead he tells me some funny stories from his own experience, sadly off the record. He will say, though, that 'any good piano player should have the potential to be a conductor, just for the simple fact that the nature of our instrument requires us [to be so]. When I stand in front of an orchestra I always say I

don't pretend to be a conductor but I do have some musical ideas.'

With six discs due out this year, I wonder how he manages his workload. 'Maybe I'll die tomorrow of over-exhaustion,' he jokes. But he thinks he's worked out a good plan, since there is much in common between at least three of his projects (the Haydn sonatas – eight of a projected 11 albums have so far been released), the Mozart concertos and 'The Beethoven Connection'). However, as even he admits, 'It's a different matter to switch from these to Debussy for the Wigmore Hall residency.'

*'I'm blessed with Chandos. I also think I'm quite good at diagnosing problems when it comes to recording and editing'*

And then there's the Sancan project. It helps that Bavouzet loves recording and everything that comes with it: the atmosphere, the editing, even working out the cover concept and writing essays. 'I'm blessed with Chandos. And I'm quite good at diagnosing problems when it comes to recording and editing.' Hard to argue with that, as he keeps garnering awards for his recorded output.

He has to dash off; two concert performances of Debussy's *Fantaisie* are coming up. But he still finds time to ring me the next day, just to remind me again of the Pierre Sancan project and to quote from one of his great inspirations. 'Solti once said, "A conductor never makes a wrong note".' I'm left feeling like I have just found a new best friend. 

► To read our review of Bavouzet's 'The Beethoven Connection' Vol 1, see page 61



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# GRAMOPHONE

## RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Peter Quantrill gives an enthusiastic welcome to a lavish set from The Cleveland Orchestra and their music director Franz Welser-Möst, a fusion of beauty, imagination and confidence



### 'A New Century'

Beethoven String Quartet No 15, Op 132

(arr Welser-Möst)<sup>a</sup> BR Deutsch Okeanos<sup>b</sup>

Prokofiev Symphony No 3, Op 44<sup>c</sup>

Staud Stromab<sup>d</sup> R Strauss Aus Italien, Op 16<sup>e</sup>

Varèse Amériques<sup>f</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Paul Jacobs *org*

The Cleveland Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst

Cleveland Orchestra © ③ TCO0001 (3h 8' • DDD)

Recorded live at Severance Hall, Cleveland, OH, on

<sup>f</sup>May 25-27, 2017; <sup>d</sup>January 11-13, <sup>c</sup>September 27 &

30, 2018; <sup>b</sup>March 14-17, <sup>e</sup>May 23-25, <sup>a</sup>July 12, 2019

When Franz Welser-Möst's contract next comes up for renewal in 2027, he will be the longest-serving music director in the history of The Cleveland Orchestra. For cynics who sniped throughout his LPO tenure in the 1990s, such longevity may serve to confirm the modern dearth of top-drawer maestros to rival the orchestra's spiritual conscience, George Szell. In post since 2002, his Austrian successor has so far hardly produced a recorded legacy comparable with the 106-CD Columbia/Sony treasury appraised in these pages by Richard Osborne (11/18). Record-label economics and orchestral manoeuvres have altered out of all recognition since Szell's heyday. Now, breathlessly trailed partnerships with DG having long fizzled out, The Cleveland are belatedly following their top-tier rivals in London, Berlin and Amsterdam, and going it alone.

If such caution speaks of a certain conservatism endemic to the privately funded American orchestral scene, to the old cultural cringe that sees all of its 'Big Five' bands still headed by European men, cast your eyes over the contents. There's nothing standard, let alone safe, about it. Even before considering the performances – which are quite something – every other aspect of the set manifests pride, care and sound



*'Even before considering the performances – which are quite something – every other aspect of the set manifests pride and care'*



Franz Welser-Möst has been in Cleveland since 2002

instincts on the part of

The Cleveland Orchestra's members and staff, even the often over-ascribed sense of family that brings such ensembles together (and often drives them apart). Articles in the 150-

page booklet feature the music, the musicians, their home in Severance Hall, its Skinner organ, and their collective place in the life of the city of Cleveland.

So, the music: as with all upscaled versions of Beethoven quartets, there is a single guiding intelligence at work which is foreign to the material of Op 132 and its dialectic. Counteracting any tendency towards elephantine expansion, however, are the fleet tempos adopted by Welser-Möst, especially in the 'Heiliger Dankgesang', and the exceptionally agile reflexes of the Cleveland strings, who do everything possible in the Minuet and finale to phrase and answer with the semblance of spontaneity. In generously doubling the bass, the conductor's own arrangement relies for its effect on hair-trigger engineering as well as playing, while the recitative-introduction to the finale is assigned to the leader alone and taken with some style.

Like the set as a whole, the performance adds up to more than the sum of its parts. What slows down the ear, tunes it into the pace of the musical argument, is the sheer beauty of the playing, like heightened naturalism on a canvas, the 'refinement and freedom' of The Cleveland highlighted by RO. There is string sound of comparable sheen and elegance on the LSO's new Bruckner Sixth with Rattle (LSO Live, 1/20), but the Cleveland musicians enjoy a manifestly superior acoustic. Szell notwithstanding, I fancy that the orchestra has never sounded finer on disc.





Glorious sound: The Cleveland Orchestra enjoy the superb acoustic of Severance Hall in performances that glow with a refined sheen and elegance

Can such beauty work to the advantage of Varèse's *Amérique* or Prokofiev's Third Symphony? Do listen for yourself and you may be surprised, as I was, before reflecting that both works belong to the 'Harlequin Years' of '20s Paris, the world of Ravel and Satie, as much as to the stories of industrial New York and Soviet Russia. Turn back to the first recording of *The Fiery Angel* – or rather *L'ange de feu*, the source of Prokofiev's symphony – and you find a notably similar palette of light and shade in Charles Bruck's conducting of the Paris Opéra (Accord, 10/03).

For an analytical appreciation of the Third, Welser-Möst's modern rival is Kirill Karabits (Onyx, 6/14), who gets the mood of the *Andante* just right – if anything a touch more menacing, a very dirty martini – but the Cleveland recording has the edge, bringing the oboe's orientalist melody at the heart of the movement a little further forwards and sharpening the focus of those icy violin glissandos: one of many points in the new set when the engineers, musicians and conductor enjoy complete mutual understanding and deserve equal credit. To be clear, Welser-Möst hasn't declawed the symphony; he has instead pulled back a fraction to show

us the whole cat, and a wary, sinuous beast it is too.

We don't have a record of Strauss conducting his early *Aus Italien* for reference, but Welser-Möst and his wonderfully responsive Cleveland musicians go straight to the top of the pile alongside Muti in Berlin (Philips, 9/90). Strauss once told Solti 'not to get too involved in the music – not to lack passion, but to be dispassionate in the execution'. He would surely approve of the Scherzo's easy sway, waltzing around Rome's ancient ruins where Muti is a little coarser and more explosively accented, and The Cleveland's own previous Decca recording under Ashkenazy is hardly more than an enjoyable run-through by comparison. Even the cymbal clash to open the Neapolitan finale makes an astonishingly vivid impact in its own right, anticipating by two years Mahler's use of an identical gesture to set going the finale of his own symphonic tone-poem, fashioned at length into the First Symphony.

The two new works, by former and current holders of the Cleveland's composer-in-association post, share a glittering array of textures with Prokofiev and Strauss, also a fairly straightforward

direction of travel: around the classical elements in a four-movement organ concerto by Bernd Richard Deutsch, coursing along the not-so-beautiful Danube in *Stromab* ('Downstream') by Johannes Maria Staud. Welser-Möst directs them both with a confidence that says they matter; at least in the case of Staud, I'd agree. Certainly the whole set matters, as a flag planted in shifting sands. **G**

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#### Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue



# Orchestral



## David Gutman listens to the LSO's Shostakovich under Nosedá:

*'The First Symphony is sometimes played as if it were the work of a careworn pensioner rather than a phenomenally gifted teenager'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 38**



## Mark Seow enjoys an album of Vivaldi's violin concertos:

*'There is a wonderful sense of communal confidence, particularly from the continuo team'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 40**

## JS Bach

Keyboard Concertos - BWV1052;

BWV1053; BWV1055; BWV1058

Il Pomo d'Oro / Francesco Corti *hpd*

Pentatone © PTC5186 837 (64' • DDD)



This is not announced as Vol 1 of a cycle, but Francesco Corti's booklet note reveals

that it is when he explains that the concertos included here are the ones which 'benefit most from the sound of a full orchestra – by which he means 3.3.2.1.1 strings, plus a second harpsichord playing continuo. The next release, he says, will present the ones which work better 'in a chamber setting'. He doesn't say what makes him think this way, so we'll just have to wait for the next disc and use our ears.

Orchestral sound and balance are perennial problems with these pieces, however, and it has to be said that Pentatone's recording has got it pretty much right, making the harpsichord properly audible without its seeming in a different acoustic from the strings. So that's a good mark straight away. The performances, too, are fleet, crisp and buoyant; Corti brings the right mix of spontaneity and control to his playing, and his ornamentation, plentiful if not always beautiful, adds much to the music's high spirits. Meanwhile Il Pomo d'Oro shape their accompaniments with pleasing detail and sensitivity.

Tempos in fast movements are well chosen, motoring but never rushing, and each seemingly chosen on merit – I liked the fact that the first movement of the G minor runs rather than prances, and the way its finale is quick but still substantial. In slow movements, however, speeds are more radical. Corti mentions evidence from treatises of Bach's time for *andantes* and *sicilianos* in particular, so while the dramatic *Adagio* of the D minor drags, other more *galant* slow movements bowl along surprisingly. Personally I feel that

the G minor's slow movement works this way but that the E major's *Siciliano* loses its dreaminess, the accompaniment poking at the soloist rudely rather than gently nudging him.

There is certainly no lack of life or joy in these attractive performances; but if you don't appreciate those slow movements, a safer bet for repeated listening among recent cycles might be Fabio Bonizzoni and La Risonanza (Challenge, 9/18, 8/19).

Lindsay Kemp

## Barry • Beethoven

Barry Beethoven<sup>a</sup>. Piano Concerto<sup>b</sup>

Beethoven Symphonies - No 1, Op 21<sup>c</sup>;

No 2, Op 35<sup>c</sup>; No 3, 'Eroica', Op 55<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Mark Stone *bar* <sup>b</sup>Nicolas Hodges *pf*

Britten Sinfonia / Thomas Adès

Signum © ② SIGCD616 (142' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the <sup>ab</sup>Barbican, London, <sup>d</sup>May 19,

<sup>a</sup>June 2, 2017, <sup>b</sup>May 22, 2018; <sup>c</sup>Theatre Royal,

Brighton, May 20, 2017



In a recent *Gramophone* interview (5/20), Thomas Adès conjured the image of

Gerald Barry 'prowling around rehearsals with a metronome in hand: one of those things that quickens every conductor's pulse!' This struck me in listening to these discs, for despite their unrelenting manic energy, there's a meticulousness to Adès's accounts of Barry's music that's largely missing from his Beethoven. Indeed, it's astonishing that these recordings of Barry's *Beethoven* (2008) and Piano Concerto (2012) were each taken from a single live performance. The former work, an unsettling setting of Beethoven's letters to his 'dearly beloved', has been recorded once before – and superbly – by the baritone Stephen Richardson with Paul Hillier leading the Crash Ensemble (Orchid, 9/16). Truth be told, there's not much to choose between it and this new version, as both communicate Beethoven's inner turmoil in bidding farewell to his

romantic idol. Richardson's portrayal is gruffly dramatic while Mark Stone is at once more ardent and disorientated, plus his diction is clearer.

There's an even higher level of anxiety in the Concerto, with soloist and orchestra appearing more like foaming-at-the-mouth antagonists than collaborators. As in *Beethoven*, there's abundant humour, although it's quite dark. Listen, say, at 0'59", where the pianist scampers up the keyboard like the cartoon mouse Jerry playing Czerny while pursued by a pouncing Tom, and then how the full orchestra takes up this idea at 18'57" in a way that suggests paroxysms of utter terror. Although the music often moves in fits and starts, there's barely a chance for the listener to catch breath – and, curiously, that's part of its appeal. 'He's the only composer who knows how to write war music', Adès told Peter Quantrill in the aforementioned interview, 'music that's frightening and full of rage.' True, perhaps, but there's palpable (and paradoxical) joy in this barrage of fury, too, and it's what draws me to listen again and again. Nicolas Hodges, for whom the work was written, plays the bejesus out of it.

I wish I could be as enthusiastic about Adès's Beethoven. His interpretations of the first three symphonies are crisp, clear and lithely muscular, hewing close to the composer's metronome markings. He's attuned to the music's myriad harmonic and textural surprises, yet too often his single-minded pursuit of energy and impetus comes at the expense of lyricism. The *Andante* of the First and *Larghetto* of the Second are both too cool and brittle for my taste, for example, and although there's plenty of raw emotion in the *Eroica*'s funeral march, I don't feel the *maggiore* sections provide that crucial sense of magical, melting transformation. That said, the opening movement of the *Eroica* had me on the edge of my seat. The quasi-fugal passage at 7'03" is thrillingly taut and the subsequent crunching climax (beginning at 7'30") packs plenty of power without losing a degree of momentum. And listen to the





Musical and intellectual friction: Alina Ibragimova and Vladimir Jurowski balance head and heart in their outstanding Shostakovich – see review on page 38

Britten Sinfonia's violins at 11'12", where one can almost hear the rosin spraying off their bows.

I think if I were to hear these Beethoven performances in the concert hall, I'd come away feeling reasonably satisfied (if somewhat exhausted), but I can't say I'm all that eager to return to them. Adès's spirit and drive capture the youthful exuberance of these works but I can think of other zesty, historically informed readings – Krivine, for one (Naïve, 7/11) – that illuminate with a broader beam.

**Andrew Farach-Colton**

## Bartók

Divertimento, Sz113. Dance Suite, Sz77. Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, Sz106

**NHK Symphony Orchestra / Paavo Järvi**

RCA Red Seal © 19439 72181-2 (73' • DDD)

Recorded live at Suntory Hall, Tokyo,

September 27 & 28, 2017



Paavo Järvi's NHK Symphony Orchestra pride themselves on their Central European sound, particularly their cultured, rounded string tone, and perform

a lot of Brahms, Bruckner and Mahler for their Tokyo audience. Here they take a trip eastwards along the Danube to Budapest for a trio of works by Béla Bartók rooted in Hungarian dance rhythms, two of which were commissioned by Paul Sacher for his Basel Chamber Orchestra.

The NHK play with admirable precision in these 2017 concert performances recorded in Suntory Hall, but they're not completely inside the Hungarian idiom. Part of that is down to cautious tempos. Bartók was meticulous in his metronome markings. The scores to the Divertimento and the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* state the precise timings of each movement; indeed, the third and fourth movements of the latter break down those timings into multiple sections. Comparisons with Hungarian conductors such as Georg Solti, Zoltán Kocsis and Fritz Reiner reveal that Järvi is frequently the slowest, often by quite a wide margin. The opening *Andante tranquillo* of the *Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta* takes a soporific 8'54" where Kocsis hits Bartók's 6'30" on the nose. Only the second-movement *Allegro* really has the tautness required. The NHK are not helped by the RCA recording, which is warm and glosses over detail, whereas the

wide stereo definition of Solti's 1963 Kingsway Hall recording with the London Symphony Orchestra allows clear definition of the two string groups, crucial in this work.

The Divertimento suits the large NHK string band best, particularly the glowing violas in the *Molto adagio*, where Järvi expertly turns the screw to gradually build the tension as the music leads to a long series of trills. And the *Allegro assai* finale features some sweet-toned contributions by the NHK's (unnamed) leader.

Järvi is at his liveliest in the *Dance Suite*, especially in the wry bassoon contributions at the start, but the recorded balance favours the strings too much, meaning the woodwinds lack pungency and the rude trombone interjections at the start of the *Allegro molto* are rather too well-behaved. Ultimately, though, do these performances really swing? Do they really dance? Sadly, not so much. **Mark Pullinger**

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*

Chicago SO, LSO, Solti

(11/64<sup>R</sup>, 12/65<sup>R</sup>, 5/91<sup>R</sup>) (ELOQ) ELQ480 6872

*Dance Suite – selected comparison:*

Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis (HUNG) HSACD32506

*Music for Strings – selected comparisons:*

Chicago SO, Reiner (1/66<sup>R</sup>) (RCA) 82876 61390-2

Hungarian Nat PO, Kocsis (A/10) (HUNG) HSACD32510



## Beethoven · G Prokofiev

'Beethoven Reimagined'

**Beethoven** A Fidelio Symphony (arr Segal).

Sonata for Orchestra, Op 30 No 2b

(arr G Schumann/Segal) **G Prokofiev**

BEETHOVEN9 Symphonic Remix<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>**Gabriel Prokofiev** *elecs*

**BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Yaniv Segal**

Naxos © 8 574020 (82' • DDD)



Like Ravel and Stravinsky after him, Beethoven thought pianistically even when

composing for the orchestra, and he wasn't averse to arranging his music for smaller (the Second Symphony in piano-trio form) and larger forces (the funeral march for *Leonore Prohaska*, scaled up from the Op 26 Piano Sonata). Yaniv Segal has precedent on his side, then, as well as discernment in his choice of the C minor Violin Sonata with its many striking contrasts of gesture, and the good taste to produce an eminently sensitive arrangement. The essential character of melody and accompaniment is retained even while Segal capitalises on orchestrally fertile expressions such as the first movement's slashing off-beat chords, the *Adagio*'s chromatic harmony and the finale's insistent rhythm in the bass, while the Minuet naturally transfers itself to the forces of a dance ensemble.

Segal's condensation of *Fidelio* into a three-movement 'symphony' after the manner of Hindemith's *Mathis der Maler* feels less persuasive, despite a spirited and well-engineered performance. It's still fashionable to take cheap shots at the composer's supposed deficiencies in the technique of writing for the stage, but all the chosen episodes are so tightly bound up with time and character and place that their arrangement without voices serves only to underline what's missing.

Gabriel Prokofiev's 'symphonic remix' of the Ninth's finale amplifies – using mostly orchestral rather than electronic tools – what is most episodic, grandiose and even banal in the original. Schiller's words, like Beethoven's notes, are treated as raw data and fed into the sampler of Prokofiev's imagination, which spits out a sequence of Beethoven-encoded parodies – of post-war modernism for the initial *Schreckensfanfare*, of his grandfather's ballet-writing (the entry of the Prince in *Romeo and Juliet* makes surprising sense of the 'Seid umschlungen' paragraph) and more effectively Egyptian-style funk for the Turkish march. As featured within a rewarding new documentary about the

symphony by Christian Berger, the remix serves to support Adorno's contention that whatever meaning the Ninth once embodied has been, in Nicholas Cook's phrase, 'interpreted out of existence'.

**Peter Quantrill**

## RR Bennett

'Orchestral Works, Vol 4'

Anniversaries. Aubade. Country Dances.

Piano Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Troubadour Music

<sup>a</sup>**Michael McHale** *pf*

**BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra / John Wilson**

Chandos © CHSA5244 (66' • DDD/DSD)



I love the analogy Richard Rodney Bennett made when describing his

multifaceted career as 'different rooms, albeit in the same house' – adding almost as a throwaway that he might have (unceremoniously) knocked down some of the walls between them. Vol 4 of this marvellous John Wilson retrospective reinforces once again just how well the open-plan approach works. Bennett – child of Boulez, refugee from the hardcore avant-garde – grew to embrace musical diversity of a Bernsteinian relish, and as this series unfolds, the inevitability of his journey becomes ever clearer. As always, the technique and composerly gamesmanship of his pieces consistently dazzles.

*Troubadour Music* is a 'flourish' for John Mauceri's final Hollywood Bowl season in 2006 – a 13th-century minstrel song all gussied up and strutting its stuff beneath the stars of La-La Land. Worlds away from his 1968 Piano Concerto, which Stephen Kovacevich premiered in that year and which sets aside the traditional protagonistic and antagonistic role of the soloist in favour of a journeyman figure, an almost obbligato presence in an ever-shifting orchestral landscape. It's an enticing piece full of textural allure and a solo part awash with virtuoso glitz and shimmer – beautifully taken here by Michael McHale, whose limpid fingerwork is possessed of a crystalline light-catching brilliance.

In each of these collections there has been something that has caught my ear for the first time and become a constant companion. *Aubade* is that piece here, commissioned for the 1964 Proms and offered in tribute to the conductor John Hollingsworth – an early champion of Bennett's – who had died prematurely the year before. This morning song

turned mourning song is another gorgeous specimen from the late-romantic hothouse, conveying a distinctly Bergian sensibility right through to the oscillating woodwinds that are so suggestive of the closing moments of *Wozzeck*.

Bennett's *Country Dances* (2001) evolved from an archaic source (an anthology of folk dances written between 1651 and 1728), an enthusiasm from the past reimagined for the present and exercising Bennett's enviable facility for making all his choices of instrumentation sound so natural as not to appear to be choices at all. 'New Dance' is wonderfully verdant, straight out of Thomas Hardy country, where it evokes a mood Bennett captured so gloriously in his movie score for *Far From the Madding Crowd*.

*Anniversaries* is his 1982 commission for the 60th-anniversary celebrations of the BBC and effectively a concerto for orchestra with a starring prominence given to the percussion section, the engine of the work's episodic design. Above all, though, it's another great example of how effortlessly (or so it seems) Bennett spins and develops ideas while wielding the largest of orchestras. And really all one can ask of performers – and John Wilson and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra deliver in spades – is a precision and virtuosity for music that sounds like it's evolving in the playing of it. Keep it coming. **Edward Seckerson**

## Brandl

Symphonie concertante, Op 20<sup>a</sup>. Symphony in D. Nanthild, das Mädchen von Valbella - Overture

<sup>a</sup>**David Castro-Balbi** *vn* <sup>a</sup>**Alexandre Castro-Balbi** *vc*

**Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz /**

**Kevin Griffiths**

CPO © CPO555 227-2 (63' • DDD)



Indentured between 1789 and 1806 as director of music to the court of an

apparently unmusical and ungrateful prince in the town of Bruchsal near Karlsruhe, Johann Evangelist Brandl composed this stately *Symphonie concertante* in hope of preferment elsewhere. Brandl was 41 years old when he wrote it in 1801, and perhaps could see Beethoven's writing on the wall.

Comparisons with Mozart's violin-and-violoncello *Sinfonia concertante* from 1779 are inevitable but best avoided. With an imposing introduction lent further weight by trumpet-and-drum D major scoring, a



grave and then sturdy central *Andante quasi un poco allegretto* and an unhurried final polonaise, Brandl strikes an elevated tone demanding much, too much in the end, of his powers of melodic inspiration and imaginative development.

For the Castro-Balbi brothers, however, the score's late-Classical pieties supply a blank sheet which they embellish with playing of beguiling finesse and invention. I like the forward, assertive character of the cello part as much as the more sweetly assuaging violin line, and Kevin Griffiths leads a deliciously pointed accompaniment.

Conductor and orchestra also impart spring and a Beethovenian sense of purpose to the overture of a Romantic opera, apparently Brandl's fourth, though the otherwise useful notes draw a blank over Lafontaine's story of Nanthild and what she did in Valbella. The album ends with an early and busy D major symphony from 1792 which hardly rivals the symphonies Haydn was writing 30 years earlier for economy or incident, or for that matter Brandl's own Op 25 Symphony in the same key which formed the highlight of the CPO album from the same forces given a warm welcome by David Threasher (3/18). It's the performance that draws praise and attention: stylistically pitched just so, led by a team of wind soloists full of characters and complemented by a well-drilled string section capable of producing pure tone without selling the expression short. **Peter Quantrill**

## Dohnányi

Der Schleier der Pierrette, Op 18

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra /

Ariane Matiakh

Capriccio © C5388 (81' • DDD)



What was it with the *fin de siècle* and sinister pierrots? Schoenberg had

his moonstruck clown, Stravinsky his *Petrushka*; and I was also reminded, reading the synopsis of Dohnányi's 1909 pantomime *Der Schleier der Pierrette* ('The Veil of Pierrette') of Ethel Smyth's recently recorded *Fête galante* (Retrospect Opera, 2/20). Dohnányi's scenario was written by Arthur Schnitzler, no less, and it's suitably moody and macabre. Pierrette loves Pierrot but is promised, unwillingly, to Arlecchino. The two lovers devise a suicide pact, supernatural elements come into play and ... well, let's just say that Freud would have had a field day.

Dohnányi – always the most Austrian of Hungarian nationalist composers – sets it as an expansive three-act ballet for large orchestra in rich late-Romantic style, complete with Viennese waltzes. Act 2's sumptuous Wedding Waltz was once a popular lollipop and has been recorded on numerous occasions (George Weldon comes to mind; there's also a fine version with Bamert and the BBC Philharmonic). But this is the first recording of the whole score, and the overwhelming mood is of lush, twilight angst lightened by occasional flashes of comedy. Act 1's miniature funeral march is like Mahler plus paprika; there's a wonderfully doom-laden atmosphere overall, with a suitably tragic peroration.

Ariane Matiakh conducts a broad, no-nonsense account; she's particularly impressive in the score's more sepulchral passages (Capriccio's recorded sound is weighted towards the bass and tends to blur edges). She builds the dramatic climaxes with considerable power. A lighter touch might have brought out more of the score's humour; the string sound could be creamier, though the Viennese wind players are woody and characterful in Dohnányi's flamboyant solos. But I'm not complaining: this is an important and enjoyable addition to the discography of a still-underrated composer.

**Richard Bratby**

## Du Puy • Mozart • Weber

Du Puy Bassoon Concerto Mozart Bassoon

Concerto, K191 Weber Bassoon Concerto, Op 75

Bram van Sambeek *bn*

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Alexei Ogrintchouk

BIS © BIS2467 (66' • DDD)



Bram van Sambeek extracts maximum characterisation from the two peaks

of the Classical/Romantic bassoon concerto repertoire. Weber revised his 1811 Concerto in 1822, not only tightening the work's groundplan but also adding a plethora of instructions to the bassoon part along the lines of *brillante* and *con fuoco*, so he clearly demanded full involvement from his soloist. He gets it here, Sambeek playing up to the role of operatic protagonist in the three 'arias' that form the work: the military *Allegro ma non troppo*, the *buffo* finale and, in the middle, a keening *bel canto* cantilena. For the record, Sambeek plays a compilation of the two versions, preserving the wider-ranging earlier introduction alongside the titivated

solo line of the revision. Mozart's K191 from 40 or so years earlier may be a simpler work but Sambeek invests it with just as much drama, providing his own stylish cadenzas and making as fine a case as any for the young Salzburger's first woodwind concerto.

For true drama, few composers can match the biography of Édouard Du Puy (c1770-1822), who managed to be expelled from country after country for such escapades as illicit affairs with royals or riding on horseback through church services. Ultimately he managed to become a leading musician in Stockholm, where his players included the clarinetist-composer Bernhard Crusell and the three bassoon-playing Preumayr brothers, for one or more of whom he wrote a Bassoon Quintet (which has been recorded by Donna Agrell, also on BIS) and this Concerto, receiving its first recording.

It's a real find, challenging both the soloist's finger technique and stamina – it's almost twice as long as either the Mozart or the Weber. Whimsy is in there too, in the bouncy closing Rondo, as well as true pathos in the central *Adagio*. It's a valuable find and a worthwhile enrichment of the instrument's repertoire. Sambeek is, of course, unfazed by its challenges and receives fully sympathetic support from the Swedish Chamber Orchestra under fellow double-reed virtuoso Alexei Ogrintchouk, more commonly seen wielding an oboe rather than a baton. **David Threasher**

## Franck

'Franck by Franck'

Symphony in D minor.

Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne

Radio France Philharmonic Orchestra /

Mikko Franck

Alpha © ALPHA561 (67' • DDD)



Mikko Franck and his French Radio Philharmonic turn to César Franck for their first recording for Alpha, coupling the Symphony in D minor, a work we hear less frequently these days than we used to, with the early *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne*, something of an unknown quantity until recently, and a piece still shrouded in a certain aura of mystery.

The Symphony gets a fine performance here. Franck understands its logic and tensions, its balance between weight and elegance, its Wagnerian overtones and moments of sensuousness. The orchestral



sound is dark yet clear, in contrast to, say, the forward brightness of tone favoured by Yannick Nézet-Séguin and his Montreal Metropolitan Orchestra. Franck balances immediacy with pace and proportion, so that the introspection, anxieties and elation of the first movement register without fracturing our awareness of shape and structure, while the second movement really is an *Allegretto*, lilting and sometimes urgent, rather than the reflective near-*Andante* we often hear. The finale opens fiercely (we could do with some of Montoux's grace and urbanity at this point), though Mikko Franck's handling of the complex musical argument, binding the work's themes carefully together, is unfailingly impressive.

We know less about *Ce qu'on entend sur la montagne* than we would wish, meanwhile. Various dates to 1846 or 1848, it remained unpublished in Franck's lifetime and for many years thereafter. The manuscript was only deposited in the Bibliothèque Nationale in 1946 and the premiere didn't take place until 1987. Nowadays sometimes described as the first symphonic poem, it both predates Liszt's work of the same name and shares its literary source, a poem by Victor Hugo from *Les feuilles d'automne*, published in 1831, which effectively imagines a cosmic symphony, 'a music ineffable and profound', in which the majestic sounds of nature and the turbulent cries of alienated humanity are heard in counterpoint.

Where Liszt is essentially dramatic, Franck is meditative. The score is to some extent ahead of its time, its opening section, in which an initially immovable E major chord gradually emerges over a penumbral pedal point, pre-empting Wagner's *Rheingold* prelude by several years. What follows aspires to a sense of timeless numinosity as shifting themes – chordal for nature, chromatic for mankind – expand and contract over pulses that alternately quicken and slacken. It's music that runs the risk of turning repetitious if not carefully handled, though Franck, adopting spacious tempos, magisterially sustains both the slowly gathering momentum and the near devotional mood. As with the Symphony, the playing has great richness and fervour, with the woodwind and brass particularly fine in both works. The recording itself is beautifully engineered and scrupulously balanced. **Tim Ashley**

*Symphony – selected comparisons:*

Chicago SO, Montoux (1/86<sup>R</sup>) (RCA) 09026 61967-2

Montreal Metropolitan Orch, Nézet-Séguin

(6/11) (ATMA) ACD2 2647

## Gershwin

'Complete Works for Piano and Orchestra'  
Piano Concerto. Rhapsody in Blue. Second Rhapsody. Variations on 'I got rhythm'  
**Cecile Licad** *pf* South Denmark Philharmonic Orchestra / Gerard Salonga  
Danacord (F) DACOCD869 (76' • DDD)



If you want to hear *Rhapsody in Blue* with the percussion predominating, the opening clarinet glissando stretched out to infinity and a mega-secure piano soloist not quite swinging in the rhythmic syncopations, you'll probably like this interpretation more than I do. At times Licad's full-power bravura seems more appropriate to the Brahms B flat Concerto, as in the opening cadenza, for example. The crisper articulation of Gary Graffman, Lincoln Mayorga or André Previn better suits the music's style.

Gerard Salonga's spirited tempos for the Concerto in F's outer movements are right on the money, and even the arguably extravagant rubato in Licad's opening solo conveys compelling character. But the solo muted trumpet and oboe passages in the *Adagio* lack the authority and melodic profile distinguishing their counterparts in the better engineered Freddy Kempf/Andrew Litton traversal, not to mention Uan Rasey's classic trumpet part in the 1960 Previn/Kostelanetz recording.

The 'I got rhythm' Variations fare best when the music is brooding and lyrical, yet I don't get a sense of the soloist and orchestra truly 'in the pocket', so to speak. The first variation exemplifies what I mean, where the orchestra's main melody and Licad's decorative passagework don't lock in as in the brisker and more rhythmically decisive Earl Wild/Arthur Fiedler reference version (RCA, 11/87). However, Licad and Salonga achieve a stronger meeting of minds in a well-integrated and expertly dovetailed performance of the *Second Rhapsody*. That said, the jazzy orchestration packs a stronger punch in more vividly engineered renditions, such as Michael Tilson-Thomas leading the Los Angeles Philharmonic from the piano or, again, Kempf/Litton. The latter remains top choice for all of Gershwin's works for piano and orchestra on a single disc. **Jed Distler**

*Selected comparison – coupled as above:*

Kempf, Bergen PO, Litton (10/12) (BIS) BIS-SACD1940

## Gould

Symphonettes – No 2; No 3; No 4,  
'Latin-American Symphonette'. Spirituals  
**ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra / Arthur Fagen**  
Naxos American Classics (B) 8 559869 (66' • DDD)



The 'Symphonette' was Morton Gould's tongue-in-cheek updating of the

'Sinfonietta' to create smaller, American-style orchestral works in a lighter vein than the symphonies of Copland and Harris that were starting to emerge in the 1930s. Gould came to regret his hybrid title, which went the way of 'kitchenette' and similar terms as a byword for up-to-the-minute modernism that rapidly became outmoded. Gould's music, however, never fell into the trap that the title did – these are just sinfoniettas, after all – and became deservedly popular as immaculately crafted light-music classics.

No 1 seems to have sunk without trace (at least as far as recordings go) but No 2 (c1935) achieved a deal of success, especially its central movement, 'Pavanne' – cunningly misspelt to ensure American radio announcers pronounced it correctly – which was praised in these pages for its 'hotting up, so to speak, of the old four-in-a-bar dance measure ... very attractively and discreetly' (9/60). No 4, the still livelier *Latin-American Symphonette* (1940; Nos 1-3 were all subtitled *American Symphonettes*), 'which belies its horrible title' (8/66) is the largest and arguably most popular of the set, with its infectious rhythms and brilliantly calculated orchestration.

There are a number of competing recordings of these works, with David Alan Miller and the Albany Symphony Orchestra the main competition in *Symphonettes* Nos 2 and 3. Fagen and the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra are just as idiomatic as interpreters and are better served by Naxos's bright recording. Of Gould's own recordings only that of *Spirituals* (1941) is available currently, part of a six-disc RCA survey (5/16). *Spirituals* is another typical work, its five vivid movements described by its composer as 'a work for string choir and orchestra', designed 'to realise the texture of this idiom' and 'the different feelings and characteristics of the folk expression'. Fagen and his Viennese players do it proud. **Guy Rickards**

*Symphonettes Nos 2 & 3 – selected comparison:*

Albany SO, Miller (ALBA) TROY1174



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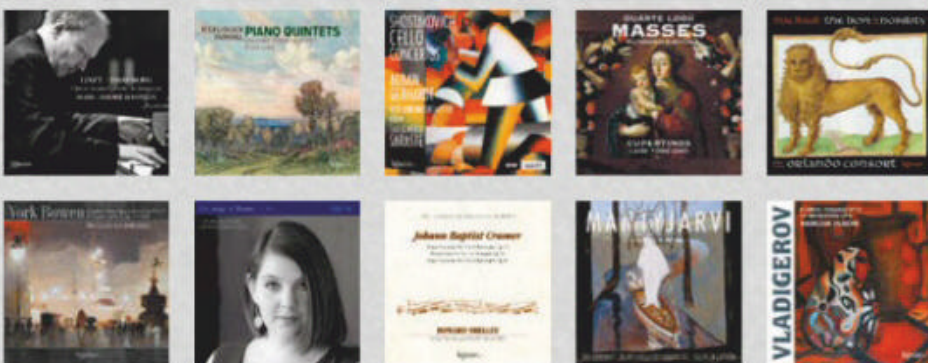
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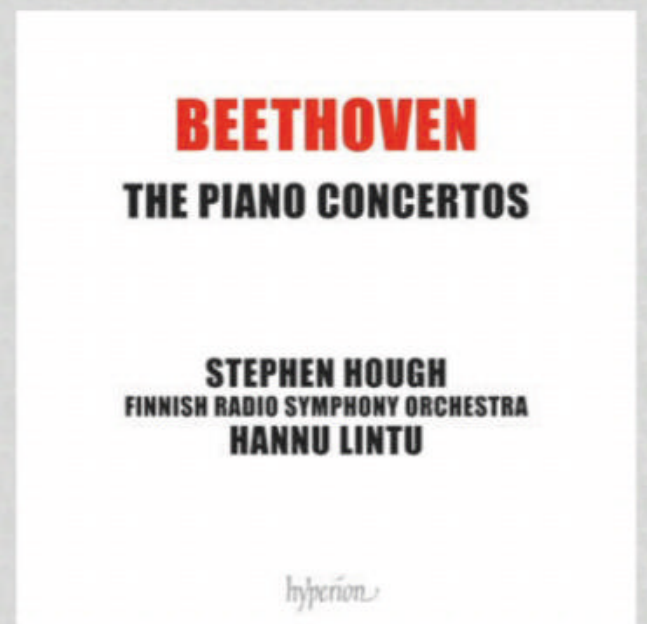
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## Hindemith

Kammermusiken – No 1, Op 24 No 1<sup>a</sup>;

No 2, Op 36 No 1<sup>b</sup>; No 3, Op 36 No 2<sup>c</sup>.

Kleine Kammermusik, Op 24 No 2

<sup>a</sup>Bruno Philippe <sup>vc</sup><sup>b</sup>Christopher Park, <sup>a</sup>Xi Zhai <sup>pf</sup>

Kronberg Academy Soloists; Schleswig-Holstein

Festival Orchestra / Christoph Eschenbach

Ondine © ODE341-2 (67' • DDD)



There are two basic options for collecting the *Kammermusik* concertos (1921-27)

on disc: either the set of all seven works, as in the 1993 *Gramophone* Award-winning set from Chailly and the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra – still the benchmark for any complete recording – or surveys devoted to specific solo instruments such as the piano (Idil Biret's Naxos survey) or cello (David Geringas, CPO). These options tend to condition how one listens to the individual works, too, as the instrument-focused recordings set Hindemith's writing in the wider context of later, fuller-orchestral concertos, something which was really not in his mind in the mid-1920s.

Eschenbach's focus is very fixedly on the earlier, wilder Hindemith in this first disc of a two-volume set (Abbado's much-reissued survey was also originally issued as two separate discs). Tempos are swift and lively, the touch light not heavy-handed, relishing the fervid precocity of Hindemith's athletic lines and precisely calculated ensembles. In the piano concerto, *Kammermusik* No 2 (1924), Christopher Park gives a bright, nimble performance every inch the equal of Brautigam or Vogt and more convincing than Biret. In the more sombre cello concerto, *Kammermusik* No 3, Bruno Philippe is a masterly soloist, subtler in expression than Geringas, arguably the finest since Harrell.

In both concertos, Ondine's bright, clear-set sound is a major factor in the music's overall impact. This is nowhere more apparent than in *Kammermusik* No 1, taken at quite a lick, with spot-on precision of ensemble and intonation and a brilliant solo turn from pianist Xi Zhai. Full marks to the wind and percussion players of the Schleswig-Holstein Festival Orchestra and the string soloists from the elite Kronberg Academy in producing practically ideal interpretations. If Vol 2 attains this level, this will be the *Kammermusiken* for the 2020s; and you get the wonderful wind quintet *Kleine Kammermusik* for good measure. **Guy Rickards**

*Kammermusiken* Nos 1-3 – selected comparisons:

Brautigam, Harrell, RCO, Chailly

(11/92<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) 473 722-2DF2

Vogt, Faust, BPO, Abbado (5/00<sup>R</sup>) (EMI) 397711-2

*Kammermusik* No 2 – selected comparisons:

Biret, Yale SO, Shimada (12/13) (NAXO) 8 573201/2

*Kammermusik* No 3 – selected comparison:

Geringas, Queensland SO, Albert

(2/98) (CPO) CPO999 375-2

## Mussorgsky • Ravel

**Mussorgsky Pictures at an Exhibition**

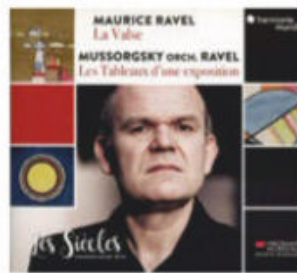
(orch Ravel) **Ravel La valse**

**Les Siècles / François-Xavier Roth**

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 5282 (44' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Paris,

November 2019



At just over 44 minutes, this new album from Les Siècles could

be considered short measure, but the performance of *La valse* is very nearly worth the price of the disc by itself. Programmed as the makeweight to Ravel's orchestration of *Pictures at an Exhibition*, the *poème chorégraphique* steals the show in a dazzling performance of outstanding virtuosity. Those slithering clarinets and queasy double basses are immediately unsettling, setting a bilious tone. François-Xavier Roth leads a stylish waltz – a reminder that Ravel was originally going to call it *Wien*, as a homage to Johann Strauss – ratcheting up the tension which releases in the great implosion at the end.

As in their *Gramophone* Award-winning recording of Ravel's *Daphnis et Chloé* (6/17), the 'period instrument' aspect is less important here. *La valse* was premiered in 1920, *Pictures*, commissioned by Serge Koussevitzky, in 1922, so we're moving towards modern orchestral sound. String textures are only marginally leaner than a traditional symphony orchestra. It is, perhaps, in the brass that the benefits are best observed, less inclined to obliterate in numbers such as 'Gnomus' or 'The Great Gate of Kiev'. Koussevitzky held exclusive rights to Ravel's orchestration for six years and made the first recording with his Boston Symphony in 1930. It's difficult to discern too much tone colour from such a vintage recording (now on Naxos), but there are some interesting tempos to compare, not least 'Bydło', which Koussevitzky drives very purposefully (2'16"), not the heavy trudge Roth takes, which is very nearly a minute longer.

The playing of *Les Siècles* is impeccable, very precise in 'The Ballet of the Unhatched Chicks', if missing some of the knockabout comedy that Theodore Kuchar and the National Symphony Orchestra of Ukraine find in their terrific reading. The saxophone blends well into the orchestral palette in 'The Old Castle' and there's a lovely clattery, crotchety bassoon in 'Baba-Yaga'. And I enjoyed the theatrical quality to the bell in the 'Great Gate', conjuring up images of the Coronation scene from *Boris Godunov*, an opera Ravel saw twice at the Palais Garnier before he wove his orchestral magic on Mussorgsky's piano work. Harmonia Mundi's sound captures lots of detail despite the resonant acoustic.

As *Pictures* go, this is a very enjoyable tour around the gallery ... but it's that *La valse* which keeps haunting me (in the best possible way). **Mark Pullinger**

*Pictures at an Exhibition* – selected comparisons:

Boston SO, Koussevitzky, r1930 (4/02) (NAXO) 8 110154

Nat SO of Ukraine, Kuchar (5/03) (NAXO) 8 555924

## G Rose

**Birthday Ode for Aaron Copland. Red Planet.**

**Seven Dances from Danse macabre<sup>a</sup>.**

**Suite pour cordes. Violin Concerto<sup>a</sup>**

<sup>a</sup>Peter Sheppard Skærvæd <sup>vn</sup>

**Royal Ballet Sinfonia / Gregory Rose**

Toccata Classics © TOCC0558 (62' • DDD)



Although his prowess as a choral conductor has long been recognised

(his performances with Singcircle of Stockhausen's *Stimmung* resonate 35 years on), Gregory Rose had not received his due as a composer until the redoubtable Toccata Classics took up his cause. This third disc focuses on his orchestral output, opening with a *Birthday Ode for Aaron Copland* (1990) of decidedly Varèsian import. Its penchant for striking timbral contrast is taken much further in *Red Planet* (2014), five evocations of seminal geographical features on Mars with the hieratic majesty of Olympus Mons providing the natural centrepiece. Anyone for whom imagination and pragmatism can coexist without compromise will find much to enjoy and intrigue here.

Not that the Violin Concerto (2017) is any less fascinating. Rose's first essay in the genre takes the form of an introduction and nine continuous episodes, between them constituting





The Bergen Philharmonic and conductor Edward Gardner draw out the lyricism in Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*

a variation sequence of deftly elided contrasts prior to a 'Cadenza and Coda' that clinches this ingenious design with due panache. Peter Sheppard Skærved makes the most of a combative solo part, while the Royal Ballet Sinfonia summon a wholly dexterous response elsewhere. *Suite pour cordes* (also 2017) is a set of miniatures audibly in the lineage of Warlock's *Capriol Suite*, its clear-cut expression thrown into relief by the Seven Dances drawn from *Danse macabre* (2011). Pithy and acerbic, these latter also form an engaging taster for the parent work – one of Rose's most audacious and a high point of music theatre this past quarter-century (already recorded under Rose's direction and issued by Toccatata Classics in 2015).

Sound and booklet notes leave nothing to be desired, making this an admirable follow-up to earlier Toccatata releases and one that those new to Rose's music certainly need to investigate.

**Richard Whitehouse**

## Schoenberg

*Pelleas und Melisande*, Op 5. *Erwartung*, Op 17<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Sara Jakubiak sop

**Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra / Edward Gardner**

Chandos (F) CHSA5198 (68' • DDD/DSD)

Includes German libretto of *Erwartung*



You would be hard-put to know from listening to *Pelleas und Melisande*, even from following the score, that Schoenberg really did have it in mind to tell a story, tell Maeterlinck's story, no less directly than when setting Robert Dehmel without words in *Verklärte Nacht*. In this regard, the Bergen Philharmonic have performed an estimable service. Notwithstanding the outstandingly spacious Chandos engineering, turn first to the live concert film made freely available (for now) at the orchestra's [bergenphilive.no](http://bergenphilive.no) site. Quite apart from the pleasure of watching as well as hearing Edward Gardner draw out all the lyricism of Schoenberg at his most Italianate, there is invaluable instruction in the form of concise subtitles which outline motifs, characters and events as they occur.

Informed in this way, the achievement of the studio recording becomes all the more appreciable for its extra precision and naturalism. Gardner is swift but never careless, and details such as Melisande's ring in the fountain or Golaud falling from the horse take on

greater musical as well as dramatic significance when paced as if to accompany the scene itself.

*Erwartung* also carries over the atmosphere of a live performance – when it was enterprisingly coupled with Beethoven's Ninth – but even without it the performance would hold exceptional appeal, for Sara Jakubiak's intense restraint, her conversational familiarity with the text and the luminous rapture of her singing, as though her own part were the moonlight and the orchestral accompaniment the forest through which The Woman wanders and stumbles. In these regards her only rival on record is Anja Silja for Decca (6/81, not the later remake on Naxos, 11/08); and yet there is a centre to Jakubiak's voice, to her refusal of total neurosis and abandon, that I find even more sympathetic, especially paired with the paler, more understated colours of Gardner's accompaniment when set against the Vienna Philharmonic and Dohnányi, like a Schiele and a Klimt side by side. For this coupling it's an obvious first choice, but also a first port of call for anyone still resistant to the idea that Expressionist Schoenberg can, and should, sound beautiful.

**Peter Quantrell**



## Shostakovich

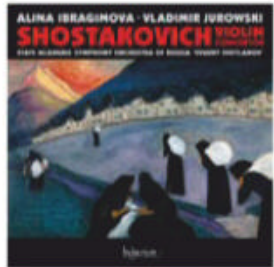
Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 77; No 2, Op 129

Alina Ibragimova *vn*

State Academic Symphony Orchestra of Russia

'Evgeny Svetlanov' / Vladimir Jurowski

Hyperion © CDA68313 (71' • DDD)



If there's one factor above all that sets these performances apart it's the osmosis between

soloist and conductor. There's a musical and intellectual friction going on here and it has to do with the balance between head and heart. If you listen to Maxim Vengerov and Mstislav Rostropovich in the First Concerto (Teldec, 2/95) – the more 'public' of the two – the heart rules, passion prevails, and the outcome is more overtly 'romantic' than anything you'll hear from Ibragimova and Jurowski.

First off, Ibragimova's playing has an unvarnished truth about it. It's the kind of playing that looks you unblinkingly in the eye and tells it like it is. She's not afraid to 'invade your space' or apply pressure to the sound until its rawness is almost unbearable. But equally she (and Jurowski and his marvellous orchestra) catches the emotional remoteness at the dark heart of the first movement and especially in the moments before the chill of celesta opens up another magic casement to the composer's inner world and the soloist ascends to create a kind of halo of sound above the deep tolling of the tam-tam.

From soloist and conductor, the bone-dry Scherzo is the dance equivalent of a rictus grin – gritty, pugnacious and then some. Strings could snap under this kind of trenchancy. And then there's that extraordinary Passacaglia which attempts to lend foundation and even a degree of nobility to perhaps the most emotive 'aria' Shostakovich ever penned. Ibragimova calls to mind Katerina's suicidal oration in the closing scene of *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk* – and any feelings that have been held in check are then vented in the cadenza. Deliberate and remorseless at first, the intensity goes off the scale as its delirium builds.

The Second Concerto is a much more personal (indeed individual) statement and one in which the words 'in confidence' are repeatedly called to mind. Its three cadenzas are essentially conversations with self and even the relationship with the orchestra is different, with the soloist seeming to 'commune' with it collectively and individually. Her dialogue with the bassoon – Shostakovich's instrument of

choice for solitude – has the feeling of being 'overheard' and that's as much to Ibragimova and Jurowski's credit as the composer's.

Street songs – like the nagging little ditty used in *The Execution of Stepan Razin* – add a layer of irony and cynicism to the mix (as in you don't always know what the composer is really saying), but there's one moment in this piece that I covet and it comes at the end of the slow movement when the solo horn brings an air of hopefulness into the equation. It's Shostakovich as Schubert and it's indelible. **Edward Seckerson**

## Shostakovich

Symphonies – No 1, Op 10<sup>a</sup>; No 5, Op 47<sup>b</sup>

London Symphony Orchestra /

Gianandrea Noseda

LSO Live © ② LSO0802 (82' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

<sup>b</sup>September 22, 2016; <sup>a</sup>March 27 & 28, 2019



Diehard LSO mavens won't need reminding that their orchestra has collaborated with

many of the Fifth's most celebrated advocates. These include Leopold Stokowski (Guild and BBC Legends – concert relays from 1961 and 1964), André Previn (RCA – a commercial taping in 1965), Leonard Bernstein (Idéale Audience – filmed in 1966 for BBC television) and Mstislav Rostropovich (a previous LSO Live issue captured in 2004). In the latest instalment of his ongoing Shostakovich cycle Gianandrea Noseda scarcely puts a foot wrong and for some listeners that may be the problem. Despite the hyperactive podium manner this is essentially middle-of-the-road, safety-first Shostakovich.

It might be argued that the orchestra has never played the Fifth 'better' and, as the performance has been sitting unissued for a while, the clarinet of recently retired Andrew Marriner remains a special draw alongside the flute of Gareth Davies. There are few unconventional corners. The first movement's development section begins reluctantly as if held back by an unusually truculent piano. Or is that just the way the instrument is miked? As usual with recordings made in London's Barbican Hall the sound is best described as blunt. While lacking depth, it does preserve the wide dynamic range of which these players are capable. Hence the coda is for once properly icy and becalmed. After a dutifully articulate, not quite laboured Scherzo, the

great *Largo* steers clear of Bernstein's breast-beating without opting for Previn's slow burn. The playing as such cannot be faulted but the control is more obvious than the emotion. The finale, which never slows merely to shore up a dissenting ideological argument, remains musically a little pale.

The First Symphony is sometimes played as if it were the work of a careworn pensioner rather than the efflorescence of a phenomenally gifted teenager. For the most part Noseda avoids too much subjective intervention and his efficient manner suits the music for all that the final denouement feels slightly stern and reined in. If only the venue had contributed more in the way of hall resonance and consequent 'atmosphere' this might have claimed a place nearer the top of a long list. As usual with this label the concluding applause has been expunged. Devotees of physical format will find that the jewel case contains separate hybrid SACDs, one per symphony. **David Gutman**

## Sørensen

La mattina<sup>a</sup>. Serenidad<sup>b</sup>. Trumpet Concerto<sup>c</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Martin Fröst *cl* <sup>c</sup>Tine Thing Helseth *tp* <sup>a</sup>Leif Ove

Andsnes *pf* <sup>b</sup>Danish National Symphony Orchestra

/ Thomas Søndergård; <sup>a</sup>Norwegian Chamber

Orchestra / Per Kristian Skaland

Dacapo © 8 226095 (57' • DDD)

<sup>b</sup>Recorded live at DR Koncerthuset, Copenhagen, May 10, 2014



Concerto form has provided Bent Sørensen with staging posts along his career

beginning with his breakthrough violin concerto *Sterbende Gärten* in 1993 and culminating, thus far, in the Grawemeyer Award-winning triple concerto *L'isola della città*. None, arguably, concedes to the *echt* traditions of the form but the composer has always had a particular and evocative way with the 'them and us' predicament it suggests; in each of the concertos here orchestra members lay their assigned instruments down to hum in harmony or play unison percussion (a Sørensen hallmark). Nor are the spatial opportunities afforded by the existence of one player against many ever wasted by this composer.

The works are arranged in chronological order and you feel Sørensen getting more fluent with those concepts as he gets older; by the time of the Trumpet Concerto written for Tine Thing Helseth in 2012-13 Sørensen has





A perfect fit for Vasks: Maxim Rysanov both plays the viola and directs the Sinfonietta Riga in the Latvian composer's pained and often introspective music

a more interesting relationship with the white space of silence and his distinctively fractured tonality feels at its most nocturnal and resonant.

Each piece, in fact, is more about resonance than virtuosity: the trumpet's journey to un-muzzled freedom (it only really finds its full voice once the concerto has effectively finished), the clarinet's search for its own avian flock (found, eventually, in the form of 11 other clarinets positioned spatially around the concert hall in the last moments) and the piano's desire to sing out the Bach chorale *Ich ruf' zu dir, Herr Jesu Christ* that it mumbles at the very start but only has the confidence to play out, for eight seconds, just as the curtain falls. As always with Sørensen, the feeling is of a floating dreamscape populated by ripples, throbbing waves, half-remembered tunes and fleeting glimpses of past happiness – contexts for each of those journeys to freedom/home.

In each case the soloist is the light source and the orchestra the echoing space, which makes these concertos tough to get inside for the accompanying orchestras, with the DNSO a little more obviously adept than the NCO. The latter is used for the two concertos, piano and trumpet, conceived on a Classical orchestral scale. From each of

the big-name soloists, the dramaturgy is subtle but as clear as day. Probably not a contender for 'the one Bent Sørensen disc you must own', but a must for fans.

Andrew Mellor

## Vasks

Viola Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Symphony for Strings, 'Voices'

Sinfonietta Riga / Maxim Rysanov *va*

BIS (F) BIS2443 (66' • DDD/DSD)



Most works by Vasks present, in one form or another, a journey towards the light –

that of political emancipation or spiritual enlightenment. In the Viola Concerto, written for Maxim Rysanov in the middle of the last decade, the journey is more strained than usual. The viola would seem a perfect fit for Vasks's pained and often introspective music but this score only demonstrates how little the tools actually matter – how deeply the composer's music has accessed those things by its own volition.

The solo instrument hauls itself up through the first *Andante* into the heavy, minor-key, syncopated folk dance that is

the *Allegro moderato* (only a Baltic soul would call it a 'joyful dance' as annotator Dāvis Eņģelis does) before a muzzled cadenza leads into the second *Andante*, which passes through a moment of ecstasy before the real fight kicks in. An *Adagio* finale ferries the work safely towards a luminous major tonality; upon arrival, I willed the music to rest there just a little longer. It is a score that assembles its parts typically slowly; but you also sense Vasks trying to push his standard *modus operandi* into a new place and not quite getting it to reside as comfortably there as it might.

On hand to contextualise the relatively new score is a classic: the composer's first symphony, *Balsis* ('Voices'), scored for strings alone and premiered in Finland precisely as revolution took hold in Latvia and its Baltic neighbours. It is unmistakable Vasks, from the early appearance of a signature chord to the late, downward bass glissando. It is clearly a protest piece, most obviously in the depiction of natural awakening conveyed vividly by the middle movement, 'Voices of Life', where a single key comes fidgeting and fluttering to life like an echo of *Das Rheingold's* Prelude. In the third movement a shapely theme emerges that could almost have come from



Shostakovich's pen, before the orchestra swarms in furious solidarity. A moving coda follows but there's not the resolution of the concerto; for Vasks, too many questions lay unanswered. Sinfonietta Riga sound with that Baltic mixture of softness and fervour under Rysanov's direction and he brings rare feeling to the concerto.

Andrew Mellor

## Vivaldi

Flute Concertos – 'La tempesta di mare', Op 10 No 1 RV433; RV442; RV445. Flautino Concerto, RV443. Recorder Concertos – RV441; RV444. Nisi Dominus, RV608 – Cum dederit  
**Il Giardino Armonico / Giovanni Antonini** *rec*  
 Alpha Ⓢ ALPHA364 (60' • DDD)



It may seem strange that Il Giardino Armonico, founded as long ago as 1985

as one of the very first Italian period orchestras and led by as brilliant a recorder player as Giovanni Antonini, should have taken 35 years to get around to producing a straightforward disc of Vivaldi recorder concertos. Equally hard to explain is why some of the concertos on this release were recorded in 2011 and some in 2017. Neither of these oddities detracts in any way from the success of the disc, however: the ensemble has lost none of the vigorous high spirit with which it first made an impact in the early '90s, and the performances have no feel of having mouldered on the shelf.

Of the six concertos here, three are for alto recorder and three for sopranino, and Antonini's playing of them is agile, crisply articulated and full of ideas. Like many recorder players he enlivens the lines with low-level, spontaneous-sounding ornamentation to add impetus or smooth corners, but he also shows his virtuoso mettle in moments such as the dazzling fluttering arpeggios in RV441. Above all, though, he shapes every phrase of his and the orchestra's so that the music is always alive, always going somewhere. Il Giardino Armonico did record RV442 long before, along with the earlier chamber version (RV98) of *La tempesta di mare* (Teldec, 4/92), but the newer readings show more flexibility, wisdom and richness – the anticipatable benefits of experience.

A non-concerto, non-recorder bonus comes in the shape of wondrous 'Cum dederit' movement from the motet *Nisi Dominus*, with Antonini supplying the alto singer's line on chalumeau with a dark,

duduk-like tone-colour that adds to its already strikingly Middle Eastern atmosphere.

Forensic analysis of the orchestra list suggests that 'Cum dederit', RV442 and RV445 come from one session and the rest from the other, but there is no appreciable audible difference between them save for the slight extra bloom provided by a continuo harp in the 'rest' session. Top-class Vivaldi music-making.

Lindsay Kemp

## Vivaldi

'Concerti per violino, Vol 8: "Il teatro"'  
 Violin Concertos – RV187; RV217; RV235; 'Il Carbonelli', RV321; RV366; RV387

**Le Concert de la Loge / Julien Chauvin** *vn*  
 Naïve Ⓢ OP30585 (62' • DDD)



Make sure you aren't holding a cup of tea when you put this disc on. The

opening chord is the first of many explosions of vigour in this latest addition to Naïve's Vivaldi Edition, a recording project spearheaded by the musicologist Alberto Basso to record the Foà and Giordano collections at the Italian National Library in Turin. Of these nearly 450 works by Vivaldi, Julien Chauvin and Le Concert de la Loge present six violin concertos. The detail in the booklet notes – which includes a list of the instruments performed on by the orchestra, including soloist Chauvin's Guarneri of 1721 – is fastidious, and the notes themselves contain some interesting musical analysis.

The playing throughout is full of energy, and there are plenty of highlights that bear mentioning. The *Il Carbonelli* Concerto, RV366, is particularly exciting. Chauvin's tempo is enthusiastically fuelled by those around him. This wonderful sense of communal confidence, particularly from the continuo team, does excellent work to avoid the chugging of the 'backing band' that increasingly characterises recordings of Vivaldi's concertos. The finale of the G minor Concerto, RV321, has funk and virtuosity in scoops, as does the opening movement of the Concerto in D, RV 217, which motors by with inexhaustible drive. Chauvin's sound is textbook delightful. His tone, however, is consistently bright and assertive; moments that explore the melancholy or dip into tenderness might have lifted this recording to enviable heights. **Mark Seow**

## Weinberg

Clarinet Concerto, Op 104<sup>a</sup>. Clarinet Sonata, Op 28<sup>b</sup>. Chamber Symphony No 4, Op 153<sup>c</sup>

**Robert Oberaigner** *cl* <sup>c</sup>**Federico Kasik** *vn*

<sup>c</sup>**Friedwart Dittmann** *vc* <sup>b</sup>**Michael Schöch** *pf*

<sup>a</sup>**Dresden Chamber Soloists / Michail Jurowski**

Naxos Ⓢ 8 574192 (83' • DDD)



Weinberg's works for wind instruments have been less well served on disc than

those for strings. His three works for solo clarinet have all been recorded before, more than once (though not all have remained long in the catalogue), but this is the first time they have been gathered on one disc – and, at 83 minutes, a very generously filled one.

The Clarinet Sonata (1945) is the earliest work here and has received several recordings since its publication about 15 years ago, arguably most appealingly hitherto by Elisaveta Blumina and Wenzel Fuchs in a programme of Weinberg chamber works for winds (CPO, 2012). David Gutman was mightily impressed with what I assume was its first recording (RCA, 1/07 – nla) and in this new, vibrantly played account it is not hard to hear why. There is a wealth of melody within its three movements, fast-faster-slow, the final *Adagio* the work's impassioned dark heart. Oberaigner and Schöch audibly have its measure.

Weinberg was a natural writer for clarinet as averred in every bar of the Concerto (1970), which has string orchestral accompaniment. It is an enormously impressive work of at times spectral introspection offset by more ebullient, even hectic activity. The central *Andante* is built around a meltingly lovely, if elegiac theme, drawing forth playing of heartfelt expressivity from Oberaigner and the Dresden Chamber Soloists. They are on their mettle, too, in the Fourth Chamber Symphony (1992), Weinberg's final completed work and the one with the most Shostakovian aspect (but not really character). It has appeared on disc most often of the three here, most recently from Mirga Gražinytė-Tyla. Jurowski's is scarcely less impressive, the equal of Svedlund's pioneering account. Oberaigner comes in and out of focus, necessarily – this is no concerto, after all – but the sense of ensemble is most acute. The players do not put a foot (finger) wrong. Naxos's sound is first-rate.

Guy Rickards





American mastery: Carlos Kalmar and the Oregon Symphony Orchestra explore 20th-century American symphonies that won the Pulitzer Prize

*Chamber Symphony No 4 – selected comparisons:*  
*Helsingborg SO, Svedlund (2/15) (CHAN) CHSA5146*  
*Kremerata Baltica, Gražinytė-Tyla*  
*(4/17) (ECM) 481 4604*  
*Clarinet Concerto – comparative version:*  
*Claesson, Gothenburg SO, Svedlund*  
*(9/08) (CHAN) CHSA5064*

## 'Aspects of America'

'Pulitzer Edition'

**Gould Stringmusic**<sup>a</sup> **Hanson** Symphony No 4,  
 'Requiem', Op 34<sup>b</sup> **Piston** Symphony No 7<sup>b</sup>  
**Oregon Symphony Orchestra / Carlos Kalmar**  
 Pentatone © PTC5186 763 (71' • DDD)  
 Recorded live at Arlene Schnitzer Concert Hall,  
 Portland, <sup>a</sup>2017, <sup>b</sup>2018



The first Pulitzer Prizes were awarded in 1917 to recognise excellence in journalism, arts and letters. It wasn't until 1944 that a prize was given for musical composition. The first recipient was Howard Hanson for his Fourth Symphony. Written in memory of his father and subtitled *Requiem*, this was reportedly the composer's favourite of his seven

symphonies. I don't find it as consistently compelling as his first three, although it does have some lovely moments, particularly in the Sibelian second-movement *Elegy* ('Requiescat') and the final *Largo pastorale* ('Lux aeterna'). Hanson, who was a fine conductor, unfortunately never recorded the Fourth. Stokowski's 1944 radio premiere (Guild, 11/11) is intense but somewhat overblown; he brings an inappropriate whiff of Hollywood glitz to the Scherzo, for instance. Gerard Schwarz's reading, part of an invaluable survey of all of Hanson's symphonies (Naxos, 5/12<sup>US</sup>), is marvellously atmospheric but Carlos Kalmar's urgency wrings more drama from the score.

Walter Piston's Seventh Symphony won the Pulitzer in 1961, and I believe it was only recorded once before – a scrappy performance from 1974 by the Louisville Orchestra under Jorge Mester (First Edition, 4/89). Kalmar's interpretation is revelatory. Where Mester made the first movement grimly monochromatic and relentlessly frenetic, Kalmar's greater poise allows for a fine play of light and shade. The slow movement is a bleak *pastorale*, with a seeming nod to wartime

Shostakovich, but the clouds part and the colours brighten in the toccata-like finale. The Oregon Symphony really show their mettle here, and the delicacy of their playing is as impressive as their collective vigour.

Morton Gould's *Stringmusic* is perhaps the strongest work on this vividly engineered disc, although when this substantial suite received the Pulitzer in 1995, I remember thinking the music to be largely forgettable. My estimation has grown tremendously over the years, however, thanks to David Alan Miller's characterful recording with the Albany Symphony (Albany). This new account is perhaps finer still, as the polish of the Oregon strings shows Gould's imaginative scoring to better effect, and Kalmar revels in the music's unabashed lyricism – note the sweetness of the sequential passage at 3'35" in the Prelude, which puts me in mind of a 1960s art film soundtrack, or the tremulously expressive tone of the violas at the opening of the Ballad.

So kudos, then, to Kalmar, the Oregon Symphony and Pentatone for doing their part to keep the masters of 20th-century American symphonism from fading entirely into obscurity. **Andrew Farach-Colton**



# Beethoven's 'Spring' Sonata

**James Ehnes** talks to Peter Quantrill about the challenges of this deceptively simple work

**L**ike many of us, James Ehnes can't remember when he first heard the *Spring* Sonata. 'I feel like it was always there!' He would have been about 20, he thinks (around the time he cut his first record, a 'fearless' debut of the Paganini Caprices for Telarc, 9/96), when he first played it through.

Now, with a quarter-century of experience behind him and a portfolio of performing and recording on both sides of the Atlantic, the *Gramophone* Award-winning Canadian violinist has embarked on a complete cycle of the 'sonatas for piano and violin', as they were first titled and published, for the Onyx label. Over the hundreds of recitals given with the pianist Andrew Armstrong, he has played Beethoven's Op 24 more than any other sonata. 'I always find it very sweet when I encounter young people who tell me that they're learning the *Spring* Sonata, and how much they love it. It's opening their eyes to a world that will stay with them for ever.'

One reason for the enduring popularity of the piece, and its status as a Beethoven gateway for violinists, thinks Ehnes, is that its technical difficulties concern refinement rather than execution. 'It can be very rewarding for a student to play a piece like this that is unquestionably a masterpiece but isn't the most challenging.'

But don't judge the sonata by its cover, he warns. 'This is the first of the sonatas where the violin starts with the melody. In the First, violin and piano begin in unison, and there's a message in itself. Then in Nos 2, 3 and 4, the piano begins. The *Spring* Sonata – No 5 – marks a departure for Beethoven, and an important one. This is one of those iconic pieces that we know so well that we forget how surprising some of its elements are.'

The stream of melody is hardly broken for 25 bars – 'and that's unusual for Beethoven. He's the king of the dramatic silence.' So the *sforzando* chords in bar 25 acquire all the more importance. You'd hardly know it from many recordings, but the dynamic of that effortlessly spontaneous-sounding first page hardly rises above *piano*. Ehnes, too, has often heard violinists playing out rather than drawing the audience in. 'I don't enjoy performances where it feels as though the musicians are playing purely for themselves and each other, but Andy and I have always felt that there's room to play the piece intimately; this is a very old friend to us.'

Diving into the weeds of Beethoven's markings, as he puts it, leads Ehnes to differentiate carefully between the descending tread of crotchets in the second-subject group (bars 41 and 45) and their ascending answers a few bars later, in quavers – just as we walk up a hill on our toes and come



James Ehnes and Andrew Armstrong have played Beethoven's *Spring* Sonata more than any other

down on our heels. The many staccato marks he interprets as a tap on the shoulder from the composer: 'Was he afraid that the violinist would get lazy with his articulation? Sometimes a marking tells you what to do, sometimes it's telling you what *not* to do.'

The first movement's exposition repeat likewise can't be ignored, but neither should it be fussed over. 'Some pieces lend themselves to exploring great variety in the repeat – say, a Haydn quartet, where there's a lot of information missing or left to the discretion of the performer. The *Spring* Sonata isn't like that.' Ehnes thinks and plays in terms of a conversation: 'When you say something you've said before, you say it in a different way because the other person has already heard it! Little differences arise naturally that way. You might say something more emphatically a second time, or if there was a dramatic moment first time round, it doesn't need stressing again.'

Like the Sixth Symphony, the *Spring* Sonata of seven years earlier (1801) is cast in F major with a slow movement in the subdominant key of B flat, and the sonata's pastoral vein finds its most sublime expression in the *Adagio molto espressivo*, with the piano part's rippling brook and the violin's answering birdsong. 'It takes me to a place where I would be very happy spending all my time,' says Ehnes. 'Andy and I say that if you put a gun to our heads and asked us which is our favourite movement of all the Beethoven sonatas, it would be very hard for us not to pick this one.' He draws my attention to the movement's still point, bars 38-54, a modulation into the minor. 'The pacing of the movement, if not the entire sonata, is based on such moments of extreme beauty.' Ehnes remembers watching a documentary about making piano wire. 'It's so delicate that it has to be pulled out of the machine at a very consistently slow rate, and if it jiggles at all, it nicks the side of



the machine and is ruined. You have to maintain the tension, and one flaw ruins it. The difficulty is not to break the stillness at bar 38; if you do that, the entire movement collapses.'


What about the blink-and-you'll-miss-it Scherzo?

'Within the context of the violin sonatas,' says Ehnes, 'this is the first four-movement work, and the Scherzo really is like a joke – "I'll write one, but who really wants one?"' Having played all the quartets with his own ensemble, however, Ehnes sees parallels with those odd recitative transitions in the late quartets; the Scherzo breaks the tension of the *Adagio* – 'in a good way' – and introduces the finale's rondo-variations.

He asks me a rhetorical question: 'Do you ever hear a piece and think, "That's a really nice 15-minute piece in a 22-minute body"? Beethoven was such a master of knowing how much time his material could occupy. He didn't need to turn the Scherzo into a six-minute piece.' Within its syncopations and silences, however, lie plenty of traps for the unwary. 'This is where you can be very humbled by the recording experience. You might think to yourself: "It's the Scherzo of the *Spring Sonata*; we'll play through this once, it'll be good to go, then we can move on to the finale." But then you listen back and hear one little staccato quaver that's slightly fluffy in the articulation. It's a really hard movement to play well, and a very easy movement to play poorly!'

*'Beethoven is writing what he thinks should sound beautiful – and leaves you to figure out how to do it'*

The finale presents more specifically violinistic problems, with its string-unfriendly chromatic theme. 'Some of it isn't so easy to play in tune,' reflects Ehnes. 'It lies in a tricky range. Around bars 13-17 you're crawling around, not locked into a finger position, and the harmonies are shifting underneath you.' Imaginative fingerings can help, but only so far. 'In Mozart, the simplest solution is often the best one: there isn't a reason to go right up the string or to make intricate string-crossings, because the sonatas weren't intended to be played that way. Quite often with fingerings in Beethoven, the way one should do it to have the best musical effect also makes it much harder. He's writing what he thinks should sound beautiful, and leaves you to figure out how to do it.'

Another, more obvious challenge is achieving an air of poise and restraint in a movement that tempts both musicians and listeners to be swept away on a wave of exhilaration. 'It's like when you see water flowing in a little stream,' says Ehnes: 'There's nothing you can do about it, you can't make it slow down. But equally you never want to feel that it's running away from you.' Just before the double bar, Beethoven pauses, as he so often does, and takes stock. 'It's one of my favourite moments in all music – so beautiful and so rare that it successfully comes off.' The page is thick with ink: 'In something like eight seconds, you have a *piano*, *crescendo*, *piano*, another *crescendo*, a hairpin going down and another *piano*. That's an attempt to say something very important but very subtle.' The final flourish, however, comes off the bow better than it does off the piano keys. 'So I guess I'm saying that he was equally mean and unfair to both instruments!' 

► To read our review of Ehnes's latest Beethoven sonatas album turn to page 55



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# Chamber



## Peter Quantrill gets acquainted with string quartets by Reznicek:

*'Comparisons could be made with contemporary quartets by Hans Gál and Karl Weigl, in favour of the present album'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 48**



## Charlotte Gardner hears a Spanish album from Tabea Zimmermann:

*'The programme's vocal origins shine forth from Zimmermann's sumptuous timbres and lyrically sculpted phrases'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 50**

## Beach • Elgar

**Beach** Piano Quintet, Op 67

**Elgar** Piano Quintet, Op 84

**Garrick Ohlsson** *pf* **Takács Quartet**

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68295 (64' • DDD)



I have often wondered why the music of Amy Beach is not more loudly acclaimed.

As part of a late 19th-century movement of American composers who looked unapologetically for stimulus from Germany – and I am thinking primarily of George Whitefield Chadwick, Arthur Foote and Horatio Parker – Beach stands as probably the most accomplished of the group (a notable point since she did not study in Europe), or at least within the province of chamber music. Her Piano Quintet, the most widely performed of her chamber works, and in which she appeared as pianist on many occasions, is a highly developed work which should be considered part of that canon of quintets led by Schumann and Brahms, and accompanied by other major masterpieces including those by Franck, Dvořák, Stanford, Fauré, Sinding, Reger, Elgar, Suk and Dohnányi.

By way of the imposing nature of the resources – string quartet and piano – the approach to the genre is inevitably one of an epic nature, almost orchestral in its bold sound and texture, fluctuating between the intellectual demands of the symphony and the 'competition' of the grand concerto. Beach's magisterial work, with its hugely demanding piano part, its plethora of thematic material and its coherent handling of form, meets both these conceptual demands (and which Ohlsson and the Takács Quartet serve with vivid colours and a vital energy). Conceived as a work in three cyclic movements, the outer movements are especially muscular in their gestures and dynamics, while the central slow movement is elegiac and brings the quartet to the fore in the first subject in which the piano plays an inner

contrapuntal role. Only with the second subject does the lower part of the keyboard play a more prominent role as the 'bass' of the harmony switches to the piano. This is highly accomplished writing and reveals Beach's true imagination as a master of instrumental form.

Elgar's Quintet of 1918, also in three movements, is of a different vintage of inspiration. Written after that miraculous decade before the First World War when the composer produced his orchestral masterpieces in the idiom of concerto, symphony and oratorio, the quintet bears witness to a more ascetic, wiry creative impulse which he adopted during the latter years of the war, when, perhaps, he was searching for a new direction for his musical voice. This is evident in the strange disjunction of the plainsong-like opening idea (akin to 'Salve regina'), the first Brahms-like idea of the *Allegro*, the enigmatic 'Spanish' (or at least Phrygian) second subject (played with admiral character by the ensemble) and the searching third idea (more orchestral in character). In fact, this predominance of thematic material has much in common with the Violin Sonata and the String Quartet, where the notion of form seems to rely more on the fecundity of melodic ideas and their juxtaposition than on their development. The slow movement, one of Elgar's greatest, is played with true profundity. Here Elgar seems to return to those distinctive characteristics of his earlier works, to themes full of sequence and modal inflection, though the central paragraph reminds us that this is Elgar of a later vintage. The finale makes much of the cyclic restatement of earlier themes, especially those of the first movement, a feature which lends the conclusion of this remarkable work a ghostliness and introspection that Elgar revisited in the last movement of his *Nursery Suite* of 1930. Ohlsson and the Takács are to be congratulated for the warmth of their interpretation and for their ability to encompass the challenging range of Elgar's complex moods. **Jeremy Dibble**

## Beethoven

**'Complete Works for Fortepiano and Violoncello'**

**Nicolas Altstaedt** *vc* **Alexander Lonquich** *fp*

Alpha Ⓢ ② ALPHA577 (144' • DDD)



For this new recording of Beethoven's music for cello

and keyboard, Nicolas Altstaedt plays on a gut-strung Guadagnini cello from 1749 and Alexander Lonquich on a Viennese fortepiano from 1826 or 1827. Not that this necessarily signifies anything, of course – there have been 'period' accounts of these pieces before now, from Wispelwey and Isserlis among others. But I've heard few recorded performances of this music (and specifically the sonatas) in which the instrumental sonority seems to inform the interpretations quite so distinctively. It's unpredictable, sometimes startling, and yet at the same time wholly appropriate to the quicksilver mood swings and constant sonic surprises of these experimental works.

Lonquich's fortepiano has a particularly warm and agreeable tone without any lack of attack. Altstaedt's sweet upper register yields before the keyboard's brilliant right-hand figuration but his bass notes supply the resonance and depth that the fortepiano can't deliver. In other words, we really do hear the slightly unstable partnership of equals that so engaged Beethoven's imagination. There's a good bit of power in reserve too – the resonance and bite of their joint *fortissimo* chords might make you jump. Alpha Classics captures the pair in a clear and attractive chamber acoustic.

But that's just the baseline. It's what Altstaedt and Lonquich do with all this sonic potential that fascinates me, and continued to fascinate me as the cycle progressed. The pair are flexible about tempos, with a tendency to accelerate that's particularly well suited to the theatricality and youthful bravura of the two Op 5 Sonatas. Altstaedt isn't dogmatic about





Expressive impetus: the Clair-Obscur Saxophone Quartet excel in arrangements of Nikolai Kapustin's distinctive fusion of classical and jazz - see review on page 48

vibrato or portamento. The soft upwards slide with which he opens Op 69 feels as if he's summoning this great work (surely the cello's own *Kreutzer* Sonata?) out of the darkness of his lower strings.

I found this performance utterly compelling: the mystery and playfulness of the first movement, the mordant Scherzo and the headstrong, joyous sweep of the finale. In Op 102, all of these qualities come into play: a sense of improvisation matched by an impulsive, sometimes aggressive energy that is somehow entirely of a piece with the tender, concentrated profundity that both players find in the slow movements of these two works. The three sets of variations are just as fresh, just as poetic and just as delightful. If you already have the *Gramophone* Award-nominated Guy/Phillips modern-instrument set, this recording would nicely complement it. I don't think you'll tire of either in a hurry. **Richard Bratby**

*Selected comparison:*

*Phillips, Guy (1/16) (EVID) EVCD015*

## Beethoven

Violin Sonatas - No 4, Op 23; No 5, 'Spring', Op 24; No 8, Op 30 No 3. Six German Dances, WoO42. Rondo, WoO41

**James Ehnes** *vn* **Andrew Armstrong** *pf*  
Onyx © ONYX4208 (71' • DDD)



I've said before that I don't think James Ehnes is capable of making an unmusical sound, and the previous instalments in his Beethoven sonata cycle with Andrew Armstrong were both made Editor's Choice (5/17, 12/19). 'The freshness and spontaneity of these interpretations is unfaltering, as is the instantaneous rapport and subtle, crystal-clear tonal beauty of the pair's playing', I wrote in December, which leaves me in something of a dilemma when it comes to describing a disc that shares the same qualities in such generous abundance that it's hard to listen without smiling.

It's worth saying, though, that these remain chamber performances, captured by Onyx in a realistic but lucid acoustic. Here's the *Spring* Sonata, in all its verdant lyricism, and Ehnes and Armstrong never force it. The score's surprises emerge naturally from the interplay of the two performers, with Armstrong's sudden *forte* chords serving as a springboard for Ehnes's naturally buoyant phrasing. Ehnes and Armstrong set it between the stormiest of the earlier sonatas (the *Spring*'s

troublesome twin sister) Op 23, and the most playful, the G major, Op 30 No 3, delivered here with Haydnesque audacity and glee. Two miniatures prepare the mood-change, both played with audible joy.

And it's also fair to say that I don't think Armstrong is capable of making an unmusical sound, either. He draws mystery around him like a cloak in the quieter passages of Op 30 No 3, and in the *Spring* Sonata his ornamentation glints like raindrops caught in the sunlight. The fact that two artists of such extraordinary technical skill can demonstrate their whole range without straining the intimate spirit of the duo-sonata medium is just another miracle of this captivating cycle.

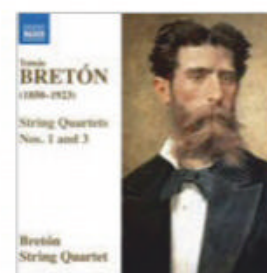
**Richard Bratby**

## Bretón

String Quartets - No 1; No 3

**Bretón Quartet**

Naxos © 8 573037 (61' • DDD)



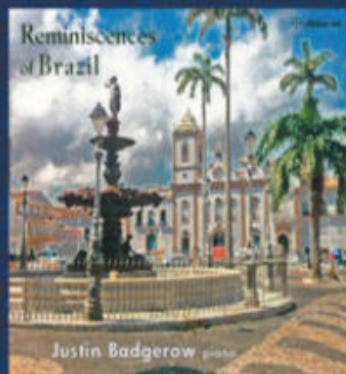
Tomás Bretón trained as a violinist at the Conservatoire in Madrid during the



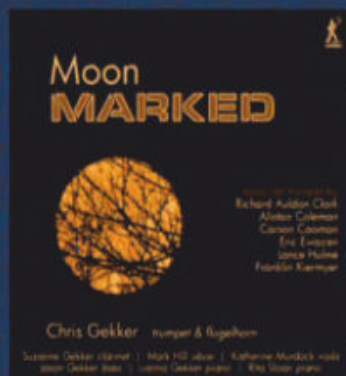
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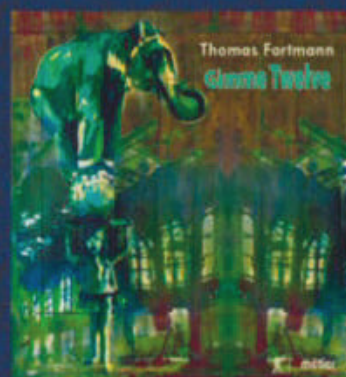
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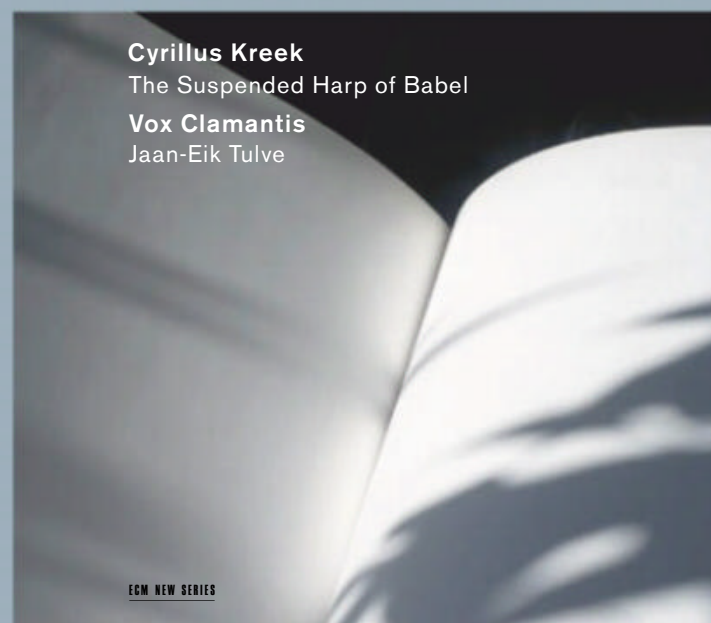
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1860s and spent a brief but formative period in Vienna. Beethoven remained the obvious model to emulate when he returned to the quartet medium in 1904 for the first time since a long-discarded student effort. Bretón may have been better acquainted with the quartet heritage on paper than under his fingers – he had in any case swapped bow for baton long before – but he wrote inside the medium with confidence.

There is more than a flavour of late Beethoven to the angular contours of melodies in both quartets here – Brahms, too, in contrasting lyrical passages, such as the pizzicato-accompanied second theme of the D major First Quartet's spacious opening movement, as well as its melancholy *Andante*. Some contrived modulations and spicy cadences hint at national flavours of which Bretón makes a main dish in the third movements. In fact he rescored the Third Quartet's *Allegro no mucho* as a *Scherzo andaluz* for piano trio, thereby accentuating its percussive rhythms, but the First Quartet's Scherzo also lets in plenty of Andalusian sunshine.

Bretón's development as a quartet composer is most strikingly evident in the contrasting finales – a slow introduction, textbook fugue and overworked coda after Haydn in the First, over-reliant on models which he abandons in the Third for the kind of dance so adroitly adapted by Bizet when writing *Carmen*. With a Naxos album of less accomplished quartets by Guridi to their credit, the Bretón Quartet perform the music of their namesake with intense sympathy in a close but warm ambience, prizing momentum over strict accuracy. There are points, such as the Third Quartet's searching *Andante*, when a more sensuous sound and less rough-and-ready approach would have been welcome, but their work in reviving chamber music from the overlapping eras of *alhambrismo* and *modernismo* leads me to hope for more discoveries from the same source. **Peter Quanttrill**

## Enescu • Ravel • Britten

**Britten** Introduction and Allegro

**Enescu** Piano Trio No 1 **Ravel** Piano Trio

**Amatis Trio**

AVI-Music © AVI8553966 (70' • DDD)



Their first commercial release finds the Amatis Trio tackling this not inconsiderable

programme for the medium by two gifted adolescents and one by a composer having reached full maturity.

Rediscovered just a decade ago, Enescu's G minor Trio (1897) finds the 16-year-old flexing his compositional muscles in a sizeable work that reconciles Germanic and French influences with uncanny focus. The Amatis render its opening *Allegro* with gusto, not underplaying the magically suspenseful lead-in to the reprise, then discreetly bring out the Brahmsian traits of its Intermezzo. The *Andante* unfolds with a limpid eloquence but also a passing anxiety that carries into the final *Presto*, its underlying vitality maintained through to the decisive close.

If Britten's *Introduction and Allegro* (1932) is impersonal by comparison, it may be because this teenager ranged wider stylistically in seeking a viable idiom. Mainly French influences (notably Ravel) are distilled into a compact if eventful design that ranks with his more durable earlier scores and might have garnered more exposure since its public premiere 34 years ago.

No one could mistake Ravel's A minor Trio (1914) as other than a composer at the peak of his powers. The Amatis (rightly) take their time in the *Modéré*, allowing its energy to arise out of the prevailing inwardness without disrupting it. The 'Pantoum' is too headlong for its playfulness fully to register but the 'Passacaille' is finely sustained to a plangent climax and desolate close, with the finale's rhetoric skilfully channelled towards its triumphal ending.

Trio Brancusi's animated take on both Enescu trios leaves little to be desired, with Chamber Domaine's understated Britten part of a collection of his formative pieces, while the Fidelio Trio's classically conceived Ravel is coupled with Saint-Saëns's Second Trio. The Amatis programme is warmly recommended, and whets the appetite for more from this fine ensemble.

**Richard Whitehouse**

*Britten – selected comparison:*

*Chamber Domaine* (2/15) (RESO) RES10139

*Enescu – selected comparison:*

*Trio Brancusi* (8/12) (ZZT) ZZT303

*Ravel – selected comparison:*

*Fidelio Trio* (11/16) (RESO) RES10173

## Haydn

'String Quartets, Vol 11'

String Quartets, Op 17 - No 1; No 3; No 5

**Leipzig Quartet**

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG307 2141-2 (66' • DDD)

## Haydn

'String Quartets, Vol 12'

String Quartets, Op 17 - No 2; No 4; No 6

**Leipzig Quartet**

Dabringhaus und Grimm © MDG307 2142-2 (64' • DDD)



Late in life, Haydn reportedly expressed the wish that his canon of string quartets should be considered to have begun not with his very earliest works in the form, from the late 1750s, but with Op 9 (c1769). In the decade since Op 1, Haydn had been engaged in writing a hefty body of baryton works for his princely employer and this consideration of solo-string sonority found its release in an outpouring of quartets from the late 1760s, of which Op 9 was the first fruit.

These days, however, the Op 20 set (pubd 1772) is more readily considered the quartet's coming of age, with its synthesis of motivic writing and counterpoint, resulting in the full emancipation of all four instruments – 'a conversation between four intelligent people', as Goethe so memorably put it. The six quartets of Op 17 (1770-71) are stuck in between Opp 9 and 20 as a sort of poor relation, and often seem to languish in the shadow of the later set – even Richard Wigmore in his wonderful Faber Pocket Guide (2009) acknowledges some perceived weaknesses and describes the theme-and-variations opening movement of No 3 as 'vapid'. Nevertheless, there is plenty to tweak the ear in these works, not least in the minuets, which Haydn characteristically reserved for his most audacious sonic experiments. The pure, sweet tone of Haydn's leader, Luigi Tomasini, is the guiding spirit, resulting in long-breathed, aria-like slow movements – indeed, a quasi-operatic scena complete with recitative passages in the *Adagio* of No 5.

Stefan Arzberger, now restored to the Leipzig Quartet's leader's chair, channels Tomasini in performances that don't undersell these three works, with a nod to their genial wit, if perhaps a tendency to matter-of-factness where something more probing might be desired. The sound is near-ideal, with the microphone training its focus marginally towards Arzberger, who, after all, has the lion's



share of the melodic heavy lifting. The resonance of the white-walled concert hall of Marienmünster Abbey in rural North Rhine-Westphalia provides a gentle glow to the sound and picks up only the bare minimum of breath and action noise.

David Threasher

## Kapustin

Duo, Op 99<sup>a</sup>. Quartet, Op 88a<sup>b</sup>. Quintet, Op 89a<sup>c</sup>  
<sup>a</sup>Christoph Enzel *alto sax* <sup>bc</sup>Clair-Obscur Saxophone  
 Quartet with <sup>a</sup>Peter Bruns *vc* <sup>c</sup>Elisaveta Blumina *pf*  
 Capriccio © C5369 (54' • DDD)



Long one of Russia's best-kept musical secrets, Nikolai

Kapustin (b1937) has latterly found appreciation for his distinctly classical take on a jazz pianism that eschews improvisation for rhythmic precision and emotional uniformity. Such an 'anti-jazz' approach is evident in his relative paucity of music for or with saxophone, but Christoph Enzel has now redressed the balance by arranging two of Kapustin's most classically conceived pieces for Clair-Obscur.

Unsurprisingly, the results prove wholly idiomatic. A seasoned instrumentalist and arranger, Kapustin can have had little problem writing for the quartet medium in his String Quartet and Piano Quintet (both 1998), though the ease with which this music has translated from strings to saxophones suggests he may have had half an ear on such a possibility from the outset. Of these works, the Quintet evinces greater cohesion and poise while the Quartet exudes greater expressive impetus; in both instances, the finales impress through their respectively groove-based energy and technical dexterity. The Duo (1999) may be slighter in overall dimensions but is no less idiomatic, its central slow movement betraying unexpected emotional candour.

Given the excellence of Clair-Obscur in all aspects of their chosen repertoire, the conviction of these performances is undoubted, with Peter Bruns and Elisaveta Blumina no less responsive in their contribution. A pity neither of two later pieces featuring alto saxophone was included but, with the added enhancements of vivid sound and informative booklet notes, there is no reason not to investigate this resourceful and appealing addition to the Kapustin discography.

Richard Whitehouse

## Montalbetti

'Chamber Music - Harmonieuses dissonances' Duo, 'Lied des Dankes für das Leben in Freundschaft'<sup>a</sup>. Hommage à Matisse<sup>b</sup>. Piano Trio<sup>c</sup>. String Quartet, 'Harmonieuses dissonances'<sup>d</sup>

<sup>b</sup>Delphine Haidan *mez* <sup>b</sup>Pierre Génisson *cl*

<sup>c</sup>Hae-Sun Kang, <sup>a</sup>Christian Tetzlaff *vn* <sup>c</sup>Eric-Maria Couturier *vc* <sup>c</sup>Hidéki Nagano, <sup>a</sup>Alexander Vorontsov *pf* <sup>d</sup>Les Dissonances Quartet  
 Alpha © ALPHA583 (71' • DDD)



French composers launching their careers in the early 1990s – Eric

Montalbetti was born in 1968 – had a rich mix of local influences to respond to: Messiaen, pre-eminently, but also Dutilleux, Xenakis, Boulez, Grisey and Murail were all forces to be reckoned with. As for sources from further afield, Montalbetti's music suggests that he enjoys a kind of postmodernism that has affinities with romanticism or Impressionism, acknowledging the continued relevance of Debussy and Satie – even, just possibly, of Jacques Ibert and Les Six. All this, while at the same time the booklet notes reference the rather different technical concerns of Elliott Carter. The stage seems set for a demonstration of unashamed eclecticism.

The four works included here provide challenging workouts for some first-class performers, led by Christian Tetzlaff. The three-movement Piano Trio, dating from the mid-'90s, then revised in 2015, celebrates different initiatives in the visual arts – suprematism (El Lissitzky and Malevich), orphism (Sonia and Robert Delaunay) and futurism (Boccioni). The emphasis is on energetic pattern-making, with repetitions combined in different, often highly diverse contrapuntal textures and moving from what in the first movement could almost be an echo of Schoenberg's *Phantasy* for violin and piano to more static, minimalist rotations, all projected with wit and precision in this performance.

The String Quartet was premiered in 2019 and its title, *Harmonieuses dissonances*, underlines the almost classical relish for gradually synthesising apparently opposed ideas and textures as the 24-minute score unfolds. As with the Trio, the rhapsodic style can come across as more mock-dramatic than truly intense, the drive to homogeneity reducing positive contrast to a very subordinate role but without the gripping sense of steady forward impetus

that gives Messiaen's slowest meditations their emotional depth. Similarly, the Duo for violin and piano, written for Tetzlaff and Lars Vogt, which runs for almost 19 minutes, combines a distinctly modernistic febrility (perhaps in homage to Carter's masterwork with the same title) with lyrical and decorative figuration that risks lowering the expressive temperature in ways that the more tautly constructed motivic ideas do not.

*Hommage à Matisse* (also premiered in 2019) is another celebration of a painter who revelled in decorative exuberance, and by restricting his range of colours to clarinet and voice Montalbetti shows just how successful he can be in blending a winning directness of expression with a subtlety that comes from constantly varied inflections of dynamics and tone-colour. The first, shortest movement is especially beguiling in this fine performance; and if the rest of the work isn't quite as engaging in the sheer character of its material, the intermittent use of improvisation lends an extra degree of spontaneity to the eclectic but far from pallidly derivative effect.

Arnold Whittall

## Reznicek

String Quartets - No 1; No 3; No 4, No 5; No 6

Minguet Quartet

CPO © ② CPO555 002-2 (119' • DDD)



Despite his Bohemian-sounding name, Reznicek was Viennese by birth and then a

Berliner by career, and despite the vintage fizz of his six-minute champagne cocktail, the 78rpm-friendly overture to *Donna Diana*, he never belonged to the band of operetta composers bookended by Lehár and the Strauss family. If you randomised the tracks on disc 1 and the *Presto à la hongroise* finale of the First Quartet popped up, you might still imagine yourself on familiar territory, even in its klezmerish central section, and none the worse for that: cheers, and time for another one. In which event the Sixth Quartet's strenuous pursuit of a tonally inscrutable goal would go down like an olive at the bottom of the glass.

Dating from 1881, the First Quartet belongs to Reznicek's student years, failing law in Graz, suddenly finding his métier as a composer in Leipzig and establishing his reputation long before the success of *Donna Diana* in 1894, first in Prague and then under Mahler back in Vienna. The



remainder of his quartet output post-dates a decisive move to Berlin in 1902, a matter of months after Schoenberg had done likewise. The chronology is complex – untangled by the booklet-note writer, who makes no attempt to hide his disappointment over the omission of the Second Quartet – but it's clear from the fraught progress and exposed nerve-ends of the Third (like the Second, cast in a late-Beethovenian C sharp minor) that by 1920, Reznicek too was breathing the air of other planets in the German capital, though he had no truck with atonality.

The Third also featured on a Nimbus album from the Franz Schubert Quartet (1/98, when it was classed as No 1), but at every turn the Minguetts make a more persuasive case for Reznicek's intriguingly liminal standpoint between red-blooded Romanticism and incisively drawn Expressionism. Further comparisons could be made with contemporary quartets by Hans Gál and Karl Weigl, or the CPO series of Reznicek's symphonies and other orchestral works, too often either stiff or inconsequential, all of them in favour of the present album. With path-breaking complete recorded cycles of Rihm and Widmann to their credit, as well as impressive CPO surveys of Mendelssohn and Brahms's friend Heinrich von

Herzogenberg, the Minguet musicians have the insight and the technique to place Reznicek in context, making compelling sense of the Fifth's terse two-movement structure as well as the Sixth's abrupt and wistful look back to a lost world in its concluding *Andante con variazioni*. Beautifully balanced engineering from the radio studios in Cologne does full justice to both composer and performers.

Peter Quantrill

## P Scharwenka

Piano Trios<sup>a</sup> – Op 105; Op 121. Four  
Konzertstücke, Op 104<sup>b</sup>. Viola Sonata, Op 106<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a,b</sup>Laurent Albrecht Breuninger *vn*

<sup>a,c</sup>Lise Berthaud *va* Oliver Triendl *pf*

Capriccio © C5391 (72' • DDD)



Philipp Scharwenka (1847-1917) knew how to write chamber music,

as the four works of his maturity amply demonstrate. His output included several sonatas, two string quartets, a piano quintet and no fewer than four piano trios, two for the standard line-up of piano, violin and cello (Opp 100 and 112) and the pair given here, with the cello

replaced by a viola. The Trio in E minor, Op 121, published in 1915, is nominally in three movements but is best appreciated as a diptych in two broadly equal halves. The opening *Andante tranquillo*, in this beautifully lyrical account taking a touch over eight minutes, is succeeded by a brief, introductory *Un poco lento* leading directly into the concluding *Allegretto con spirito*, which together take a little under nine. The earlier Trio, Op 105, is really in a single span comprised of a relatively brief A minor introduction, *Andante sostenuto*, followed by a weightier finale in A major. Unusually, it was originally published as 'Duo for violin and viola, with piano accompaniment' in 1898 but is generally known today as the Trio in A major.

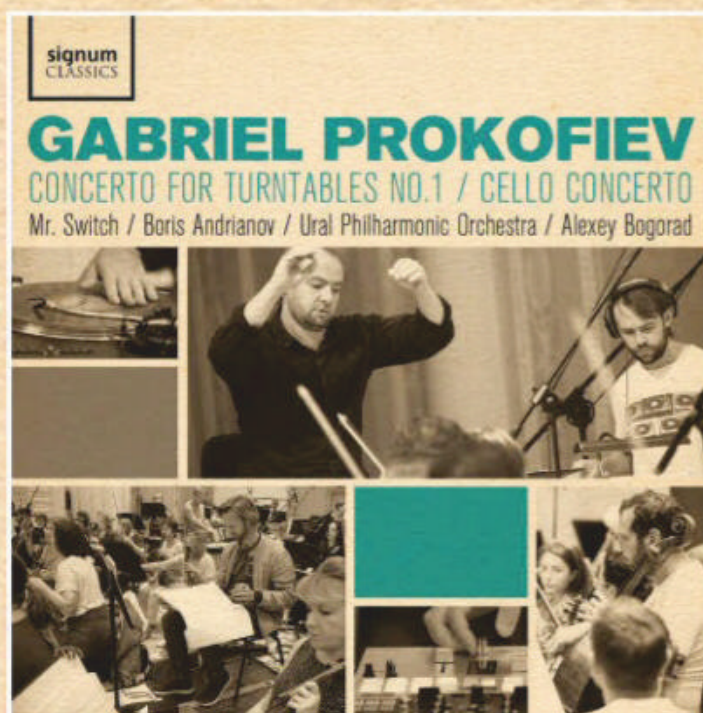
Laurent Albrecht Breuninger, Lisa Berthaud and Oliver Triendl play both works with impeccable intonation, ensemble and musicianship. Their collective understanding of Scharwenka's idiom – and each other – is tangible throughout, bringing these beautifully if slightly unconventionally proportioned works to life. Breuninger and Berthaud separately give polished performances of the two couplings, the delightful Viola Sonata in G minor (1899) and



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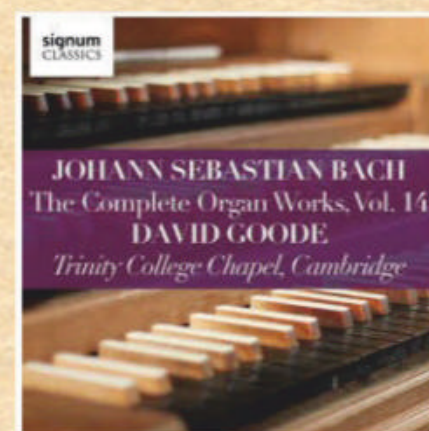
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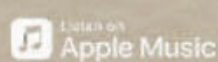
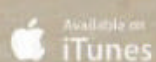
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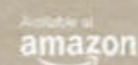
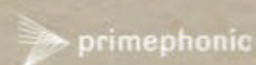
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the *Konzertstücke* for violin (1898), both with piano accompaniment. The Sonata, with its opening Fantasia, plays without breaks and is the more impressive of the two. Beautifully played, very nicely recorded and with no other accounts of these works currently available, this issue is self-recommending.

Guy Rickards

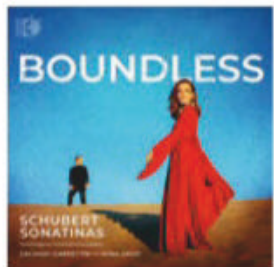
## Schubert

'Boundless'

Three Violin Sonatinas

Zachary Carrettin *vn* Mina Gajić *pf*

Sono Luminus © DSL92240 (56' • DDD)



Schubert composed this trio of small-scale sonatas in the spring of 1816, right around the time he was at work on his Fourth Symphony. They make a lovely set for an hour's worth of listening, for while they're clearly cut from the same cloth, each work has its own distinct character.

Here, unfortunately, Zachary Carrettin and Mina Gajić – playing on period instruments – are interpretatively straightforward to the point of bluntness. In the songlike *Andante* of D384, for instance, they make me uneasily aware of the ticking quavers, making me feel as if Father Time is breathing down my neck. What a relief to turn to Andrew Manze and Richard Egarr, whose flexible phrasing suggests an atmosphere of relaxed, convivial music-making. Manze and Egarr are also more responsive to Schubert's dynamic markings. Perhaps they're a little too free with their rubato at the beginning of D385's finale, but at least they play it quietly, as indicated. Carrettin and Gajić are most impressive in the Menuettos of D385 and D408, both of which swing with ease, and they bring appealing delicacy to the Trio section of the former. Their supple, tender reading of D408's *Andante* is another high point, and I only wish they'd shown as much vulnerability elsewhere.

The recording was made in a small auditorium nestled in a nature preserve in Boulder, Colorado, and the intimate acoustic created by Sono Luminus's engineers seems entirely apt for music that's intended for domestic performance (Manze and Egarr, by contrast, seem to be playing in a cavernous concert hall). Carrettin uses a period bow but plays a post-war instrument by Franz Kinberg designed specifically for early 19th-century

repertory. His sound is finely shaded but can become gratingly whiny above the stave. Gajić plays an 1835 Érard that's notable as much for its evenness of tone as for its transparency. If you insist on period instruments for these works, I'd stick with Manze and Egarr; otherwise, Ibragimova and Tiberghien are the cream of the crop.

Andrew Farach-Colton

*Selected comparisons – coupled as above:*

Manze, Egarr (A/O7) (HARM) HMU90 7445

Ibragimova, Tiberghien (9/13) (HYPE) CDA67911/12

## 'Cantilena'

Albéniz España – Tango Casals Al ángel

travieso. En el mirall canviat de la mar blava.

En sourdine. Tres Estrofas de amor

Falla Siete Canciones populares españolas

Granados Tonadillas en estilo antiguo (excs)

Montsalvatge Cinco Canciones negras

Piazzolla Le Grand Tango Villa-Lobos

Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 – Ária (Cantilena)

Tabea Zimmermann *va* Javier Perianes *pf*

Harmonia Mundi © HMM90 2648 (72' • DDD)



Tabea Zimmermann makes quite an entrance with the programme-opener

on 'Cantilena', Piazzolla's *Le Grand Tango*. Not because it's an explosive bang, but because of the velvety warmth and soft clarity of her tone, even when she climbs into her upper registers and really starts slicing through the air. Essentially, there are no rough edges, which very much fits with the album concept: to offer an overview of the way in which the viola's warm, rich and penetrating timbre adapts to 'carrying the tune' across a programme of Spanish and Latin American works originally written for the voice. Of course, *Le Grand Tango* wasn't originally a vocal piece but a cello one, written for Rostoprovich in 1982. However, it sits as one of the programme's purely instrumental tango bookends along with Henri Classens's viola transcription of the Tango from Albéniz's *España* piano cycle.

Onwards from the Piazzolla, and the programme's vocal origins do indeed shine forth from Zimmermann's sumptuous timbres and lyrically sculpted phrases. Take the lilting *lento* rise and fall of the ensuing 'Cuba dentro de un piano' from Xavier Montsalvatge's *Cinco Canciones negras* (first sung in 1945 by the Catalan soprano Mercè Plantada), where it takes little imagination to hear a languorous human voice across Zimmermann's sultrily dark tone, gentle

rubato and subtle portamento shading. Further pleasures come via Falla's *Siete Canciones populares españolas* of 1915, in the viola-and-piano transcriptions made with Falla's blessing by the Spanish viola player and pedagogue Emilio Mateu and pianist Miguel Zanetti. Here, the outer movements require the viola to take on the dual role of soaring, tenderly piercing soprano voice and mellow-stringed guitarist, and Zimmermann flicks out the guitar's pizzicato chords with satisfyingly rhythmic, soft-edged panache.

Perianes meanwhile is both a selflessly sympathetic partner to Zimmermann and effortlessly under the music's skin, whether he's floating swirling, dreamlike figurations underneath her in Casals's art song-esque 'En sourdine' (and the legendary cellist's four songs, transcribed by Zimmermann herself, have been the disc's happy discovery for me), or tapping out with fiery precision the rapid repeated notes of Falla's 'Polo'. So three cheers to the engineering for bestowing every bit as much love and immediacy of tone on him as it does on Zimmermann herself – the icing on the cake of this thoroughly distinctive and enjoyable album.

Charlotte Gardner

## 'Exiles in Paradise'

Achron Stimmungen, Op 32 No 1

Castelnuovo-Tedesco I nottambuli (Variazioni fantastiche), Op 47 Gershwin It ain't necessarily so (arr Heifetz) Godowsky Alt Wien (arr Heifetz)

Gruenberg Jazzette, Op 26 No 3 Korngold

Much Ado About Nothing – Suite, Op 11

Rachmaninov Serenade, Op 3 No 5

Rózsa Toccata capricciosa, Op 36

Schoenberg Saget mir, auf welchem Pfade,

Op 15 No 5 Stravinsky Berceuse Toch

Three Impromptus, Op 90c Waxman

Carmen-Fantasy

Brinton Averil Smith *vc* Evelyn Chen *pf*

Naxos © 8 579055 (66' • DDD)



Émigré composers who wound up in Hollywood (or at least in the

neighbourhood) are the agents that bind this excellently performed, programmed and engineered cello recital. I suspect the topic provides an excuse for Brinton Averil Smith to trespass on violinists' property and pilfer a few virtuoso showpieces! Consequently we get none of Franz Waxman's original music but rather his daredevil fantasy drawing upon



GRAMOPHONE *talks to ...**Tabea Zimmermann*

The viola player talks about her album of Spanish and Latin American music, 'Cantilena', her collaboration with the Spanish pianist Javier Perianes and her new instrument

**How did this album come about?**

In 2011 a Spanish friend of mine introduced me to Javier Perianes and suggested that we should do a recital together. When Javier came to Berlin, we met for a few hours of music sight-reading – a beautiful first encounter – and then we booked some recitals together for the following season. In those rehearsals and concerts I learnt a lot from Javier's Spanish tradition!

After many more concerts together we planned a recital tour in the US for this March. Such an American viola recital tour is very unusual and something I'd never done, and we recorded this album ready for the tour. After rehearsals and preparatory concerts in late November and early December, we recorded the album in Berlin, did the editing right away, and Harmonia Mundi had the finished product ready for the tour. And then the pandemic stopped us from travelling. It is a pity but I hope in two years' time we can finally do the tour we had prepared.

**The vocal transcriptions highlight the singing quality of the instrument – do you have a human voice in mind when playing these pieces?**

I find singing always comes before playing on any instrument. We need to find the musical grammar, the breathing, etc. If I sing a phrase, I will find the natural tempo because of the necessary breathing. I can then consciously decide to stretch it a little bit more on the

instrument but the relation of time and sound are always important. We need to look for the inner logic in the language of each composer. Only after finding it in one specific set-up can we then play around with changing the environment.

**Was Kim Kashkashian's 2007 album 'Asturiana' an inspiration?**

I listened to Kim's recording when it first came out, but later I looked only at the printed music and at other sources. I have to finalise my interpretation without much outside influence. I need to learn from inside the material, and cannot really do it another way.

**You play a modern viola by Patrick Robin – can you tell us about this instrument?**

After playing my Vatelot for 35 years and loving it more and more, it started to get a bit difficult for me. My hand is not very big and turning 50 made me aware of some slightly reduced flexibility in my joints. Stretching the fingers for complicated double-stops or harmonics was becoming much harder.

Patrick Robin has been showing me his violas over the past 10 years or so, and we had an ongoing discussion about where to look for improvement for the modern viola in general, taking into consideration the many different sizes, sound characteristics and the human factor of different height, arm length



and flexibility. I remember telling him that I would like to order a viola that ideally had a sound somewhere along the characteristics of my Vatelot, possibly even with a similar outer shape, but with a somewhat shorter string length – and some other specifics, like a rather flat bridge to facilitate chords, a rather narrow neck for comfort, and so on.

Robin delivered the viola on June 1 last year and it sounded so beautiful that I played my first concert with it on June 7. This was a big risk, of course, and I had to practise a lot over the following months to get used to the instrument. But it was so much fun – and it still is! We are only talking about 3mm difference in string length, but I like the lightness and the comfort. The mix of different wood and different concepts, the very original and personal sound in performance and the complete playability have all made this a very good move for me.

themes from Bizet's *Carmen* that Jascha Heifetz made famous. As it happens, Smith plays the bejesus out of it, making child's play of the rapid-fire spiccato and almost impossible-to-control harmonics. Heifetz's own scampering rendition of the Gershwin's 'It ain't necessarily so' also falls easily and playfully across Smith's agile bow, while, by contrast, Godowsky's *Alt Wien* teems with old-school elegance and just the right dose of schmaltz.

'Saget mir, auf welchem Pfade' from Schoenberg's *The Book of the Hanging Gardens* loses nothing in translation from text-driven soprano to cello instrumental. Indeed, Smith ought to take on the entire

song-cycle! He nails the wide interval leaps and angular syncopations of the third of Louis Gruenberg's *Jazzettes* to stylistic perfection. While cello fanciers will find much to savour in Smith's nimble facility and poised reserve in Ernst Toch's solo Impromptus, I prefer the heated intensity and wider dynamic range of Frank Dodge's altogether broader, more editorialised interpretations (also on Naxos). Conversely, Smith's lightness of being and effortless aplomb work to his competitive advantage in Rózsa's wonderful *Toccata capricciosa* when measured alongside heavier-gaited catalogue contenders.

Castelnuovo-Tedesco's *I nottambuli* represents the disc's substantial point of centre in its inventive fusion of fanciful flourishes and formal unity. In the absence of Frederick Moyer's excellent 1999 recording, once available from Biddulph, Smith's impassioned and variegated execution of the cello part is matched by Evelyn Chen's comparably committed support. In fact, her thrusting accents in Smith's Rachmaninov transcription evoke something of Rachmaninov's own pianism, not to mention the colour she brings to Korngold's juicy harmonic language. The cellist's informative booklet notes further enhance my recommendation. **Jed Distler**



# Anthony Rolfe Johnson

To mark a decade since his death, **Richard Fairman** waxes lyrical about the extraordinary vocal qualities of the English dairy farmer turned tenor who began by singing to his cows

**T**his July marks 10 years since Anthony Rolfe Johnson died, too young at 69. For those lucky enough to have heard him throughout his career, that voice will always be with them – beautiful, plangent, a sound that seeped into the soul. Although he once said, ‘A tenor is a tenor is a tenor,’ his own very individual tenor haunts one still.

In his earlier years he came to notice most prominently as a founder member (in 1976, aged 35) of the Songmakers’ Almanac. Those evenings at Wigmore Hall were delightful Schubertiades for our time, thought winsome by some, but presided over by the erudite Graham Johnson and memorable for four fresh, young voices: Felicity Lott, Ann Murray, Richard Jackson and, of course, Rolfe Johnson.

Looking back at their early encounters, Johnson has recalled a masterclass with Pierre Bernac in which Rolfe Johnson sang Poulenc’s ‘Bleuet’. ‘My God, what a singer you are!’ commented Bernac, Poulenc’s foremost interpreter. Johnson remembers the young tenor’s closing lines being ‘heart-stopping’, and years later the two of them recorded the song for the Hyperion album ‘Voyage à Paris’. The tenderness there is deeply touching, but so it always was. There was something so affecting in the timbre of Rolfe Johnson’s voice that one hardly noticed any artistry being applied (though, of course, there was plenty, as his sensitive shaping of Poulenc’s phrases shows).

Perhaps that naturalness had its roots in his modest beginnings as a singer. He used to reminisce about how his earliest experience came from singing to the cows on a dairy farm. ‘I used to [...] hum in a bass key while I was working and it seemed to please them. At least, they didn’t run frightened from the shed, so I guess it was all right.’ When asked what he sang to them, he said, ‘Mostly hymns, because that was all I knew.’

He was already 29 when he made his initial breakthrough, an early success being

Britten’s *Nocturne* on BBC Radio 3. The works that Britten wrote for Peter Pears suited Rolfe Johnson’s voice well, and he repaid the compliment by endowing them with a new, lambent beauty of sound. His *Winter Words* warmed the heart. His *Seven Sonnets of Michelangelo* (a special early memory from a summer Wigmore Hall recital) radiated a romantic Mediterranean glow.

An English tenor invariably finds that versatility comes with the territory. Opera, oratorio and song, from many periods and in many styles, all had their place in a career that stretched from Monteverdi (a wonderful *Orfeo* at ENO) and much Handel to Elgar’s *The Dream of Gerontius* and Britten’s *Peter Grimes*.

At the centre of everything came Mozart. Asked what was required for singing Mozart, he declared, ‘Courage!’

Mozart is the most difficult music that one can hope to succeed in. It’s very, very exposed.’ A mellifluous Tamino at ENO, much cheered, was the first Mozart role I heard him sing live. On disc, his Idomeneo, peerless among his generation, and Tito are prime recommendations. Both recordings were made with John Eliot Gardiner and his period orchestra. Important colleagues, they were alongside Rolfe Johnson for many of his finest hours in the studio – Monteverdi’s *Orfeo*, the two great

Bach Passions, Handel’s *Acis and Galatea* and *Semele*, Britten’s *War Requiem*.

It is hard to go wrong with any of these recordings, for a partnership forged live in the concert hall transferred to disc as if the vitality had been bottled at source. The tenor described Gardiner and his group as having been ‘a huge part of my life for a long time’, saying that they worked together ‘wonderfully’.

My last memory of Rolfe Johnson is at the Opera Theatre of Saint Louis in 1997, again in Monteverdi’s *Orfeo* but now as conductor. American tenor Gregory Turay was in the title-role, and at the end, Rolfe Johnson climbed out of the pit to sing Apollo alongside

*There was something so affecting in the timbre of Rolfe Johnson’s voice that one hardly noticed any artistry being applied*

## DEFINING MOMENTS

### •1973 – *Opera debut at Sadler’s Wells, London*

First main operatic role is Count Vaudémont in Tchaikovsky’s *Iolanta* for the English Opera Group

### •1983 – *A notable Britten role*

Makes his role debut as Gustav von Aschenbach in Britten’s *Death in Venice* in Geneva

### •1987 – *Debut at Salzburg*

Salzburg Festival debut as Johannes in Franz Schmidt’s oratorio *Das Buch mit sieben Siegeln*

### •1988 – *Takes on the role of artistic director*

Gregynog Music Festival in Wales relaunched with Rolfe Johnson as artistic director

### •1991 – *Met Opera debut*

Replaces the indisposed Pavarotti as Idomeneo in New York

### •1992 – *Receives an honour*

Made a CBE in the Queen’s Birthday Honours

### •1999 – *A contemporary opera premiere*

Sings Polixenes, King of Bohemia, in the world premiere of Philippe Boesmans’s *Wintermärchen* in Brussels





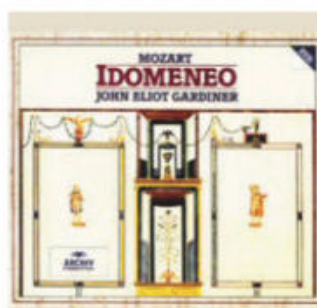
his youthful successor – a magically symbolic moment, as this famed Orfeo handed over to the younger generation.

We were lucky to have two outstanding (and yet so different) English tenors through those years. Throughout their careers, Rolfe Johnson and Philip Langridge went along side by side, each forging his own route, sometimes through the same repertoire. Rolfe Johnson was the pure musician of the two, appealing directly to the heart – ‘quietly seductive’, as Graham Johnson has described him. Langridge was the thinker, probing texts and characters for inner meaning and intensity. Losing them both within a few months was a double blow.

When he featured on BBC radio’s *Desert Island Discs* in 1992, Rolfe Johnson

was asked what he would like as his luxury item. He chose a couple of square metres of parquet flooring, an inexhaustible supply of tap shoes and an instruction book, so that he could ‘learn to tap dance and get fit at the same time’. Let us hope that he has honed his dancing skills where he is now. ©

#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



**Mozart** *Idomeneo*

Anthony Rolfe Johnson *ten* von Otter *mez* Monteverdi Choir; English Baroque Soloists / John Eliot Gardiner et al  
DG (6/91)

Mozart was a favourite composer and *Idomeneo* surely the finest of Rolfe Johnson’s Mozart roles. Many tenors are stretched by its challenges, but he embraced its heroism, pathos and exacting coloratura while always showing us, above all, a human being.



# Instrumental



## Harriet Smith listens to Schubert piano duets played on an 1848 Pleyel:

*'The transparency and varied tonal colours of the Pleyel are particularly effective in the Rondo, which they imbue with charm'* ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 60](#)



## David Fanning has mixed feelings about Sokolov's new album:

*'The performance of Beethoven's Op 111 is outstanding for its peerless articulation and unremitting intensity'* ► [REVIEW ON PAGE 60](#)

## JS Bach

'The Complete Works for Keyboard, Vol 3 - In the French Style'

**JS Bach** Allein Gott in der Höh sei Ehr<sup>a</sup> - BWV663a; BWV711; BWV715; BWV717. Aria nach François Couperin, BWV587<sup>a</sup>. Fuge über das Magnificat, BWV733<sup>a</sup>. Herr Jesu Christ, dich uns zu wend<sup>a</sup> - BWV655a; BWV709; BWV726. Minuets<sup>b</sup> - BWV841; BWV842; BWV843. Nun freut euch, lieben Christen gmein, BWV734<sup>a</sup>. Ouverture (Suite), BWV820<sup>b</sup>. Passacaglia, BWV582<sup>a</sup>. Pièce d'orgue, BWV572<sup>a</sup>. Praeludium (Harpeggiando), BWV921<sup>b</sup>. Suites<sup>b</sup> - BWV806a; BWV807; BWV809; BWV838a; BWV819; BWV823; BWV996 **F Couperin** L'art de toucher le clavecin - Prélude V<sup>b</sup>. Pièces de clavecin, Book 4 - La Couperin<sup>b</sup> **JCF Fischer** Les pièces de clavessin, Op 2<sup>b</sup> - Chaconne; Praeludium VIII **Grigny** Pange lingua, récit du chant de l'hymne précédent<sup>a</sup> **Raison** Christe (Trio en passacaille)<sup>a</sup> **Benjamin Alard**<sup>b</sup> [hpd.org](#)

Harmonia Mundi ® ③ HMM90 2457/9 (3h 29' • DDD)

<sup>a</sup>Played on the 1710 Andreas Silbermann organ of the Abbaye Saint-Étienne, Marmoutier, France



Benjamin Alard's project to record Bach's complete works for harpsichord and

organ is an awesome one; there must be few who have attempted it, or indeed who could. Add to that his ingenious approach, presenting in 17 volumes Bach's development in chronological sequence enhanced by occasional examples of works by some of the composers who influenced him, and you have the potential for something very special and revealing, a real journey to be savoured over a period of years.

With Vol 3 Alard reaches Bach's years as court organist and chamber musician at Weimar from 1708 to 1717, during which he entered what is often considered his early maturity. Alard's focus here is on Bach's interest in and early encounters with the French style, the most obvious reflection of which lies in the harpsichord

suites which dominate two of the three discs. They include the two suites similar to the so-called *French Suites*, three of the *English Suites* (No 1 in an early version) and the E minor Lute Suite, BWV996 (in all likelihood really a keyboard piece). The French influence in these pieces is obvious, but needless to say Bach's character and German background are evident. The Frenchness of the organ chorales is less clear at first, until Alard drops in a chant-based piece by Nicolas de Grigny. The connections are then cemented by setting the great Passacaglia in C minor alongside the little piece by André Raison that supplied its theme. The way Alard's programming revels in such juxtapositions, rather than just spilling out Bach's music in the familiar genre groupings, is one of the most fascinating features of this whole project.

He uses a different instrument for each disc: the gorgeous, fruity, deep-toned French harpsichord from Château d'Assas; a copy of a German harpsichord whose mellow tone makes a nice 'lutey' sound for BWV996; and the Andreas Silbermann French-style organ in the Abbaye Saint-Étienne in Marmoutier, Alsace, which has the solidly differentiated and feisty colours to bring out the best not just in the great Passacaglia but in the interlacing lines of the chorales as well. I enjoyed Alard's playing on the organ more, in fact; despite the big sounds being unleashed there is a cleanness and a quality of light here, superbly captured by the recording, that keeps everything clear, coherent and involving. His harpsichord-playing is in many ways no less distinguished, likewise prizing clarity and elegance over show, even when delivering the organy flourishes of BWV818a's Prélude. There is a precision to his touch that avoids hardness, and a proper respect for tone-quality. But there were quite a few times when I wished for more flexibility of tempo, particularly in dance movements, and I also felt Alard could have experimented with *inégaie* and varied his ornamentation more. But he is a classy player, and this is certainly a project

with the potential to tell us much about its noble subject. Definitely worth following.

**Lindsay Kemp**

## JS Bach

Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012

**Alisa Weilerstein** VC

Pentatone ® ② PTC5186 751 (161' • DDD)



Perhaps the most illuminating way to sample this remarkable set is to home in on

three consecutive movements from the sombre-hued Fifth Suite, music written in *scordatura* with the A string tuned down to G. The growling, bass-heavy Courante (disc 2, track 15) defies its weight and manages to dance, while also admitting an exceptionally generous roster of colours. Here, as elsewhere in the Suite, and even in spite of its baritone gruffness, Alisa Weilerstein calls on a varied tonal palette, reaching across a considerable dynamic range and employing subtle shifts in shading, articulation and expressive vibrato. In general her tempos are broader than the norm, certainly in the succeeding Sarabande, which clocks up a very expansive 5'28" (Yo-Yo Ma's latest recording is a 'mere' 3'10", Steven Isserlis 3'55" and Emmanuelle Bertrand 3'53"); but its trancelike effect held me captive, especially in the second half of the movement when, as she approaches the repeat, she reduces her tone to a ghostly whisper.

'The intrinsic impossibility of this music is the very source of its freedom', writes Weilerstein on the disc jacket, and no single track proves her point more appositely. The magisterial first Gavotte that follows employs a stimulating mix of colours that's similar to the one used in the Courante and that makes it eventful to listen to, while the swirling second Gavotte arrives in tempo. Other highlights include the Sarabande from the Fourth Suite which, for all its broad pacing (5'25"),





Bach in miniature: Stephen Farr plays the short Preludes of the *Orgelbüchlein* on the 1730 Trost organ of the Stadtkirche in the German town of Waltershausen

treads its triple time with ease and nobility, reminding us that the dance's name derives from the Spanish *zarabanda*. Bertrand's swifter performance (4'03'') is also appealing though paradoxically it's Weilerstein who more evokes the image of a solemn but mobile procession. The tripping Courante is teasingly played, elegant and lightly bowed too, much as the Suite's closing Gigue dances to the lilt of Weilerstein's phrasing. The First Suite's Courante is more playfully emphatic, whereas the opening of the Third Suite's Prelude lands on a bed bereft of vibrato and the lively Courante seems to approximate the sound of laughter. The Prelude to the Sixth Suite on the other hand finds Weilerstein projecting her full, burnished tone evenly across all registers.

So yet another superb digital set of the Cello Suites, one to place alongside Emmanuelle Bertrand, Alban Gerhardt, Steven Isserlis, Thomas Demenga and Yo-Yo Ma (his latest version). And Weilerstein's special qualities? Her resolve to allow each movement of each suite to shine on its own terms. Hers is not an overview systematically imposed but more a way to facilitate the cycle's immense expressive range piecemeal. Not that the best of her rivals don't; but with Weilerstein you enjoy the sensation

of being escorted through a Baroque dance hall by an all-encompassing commentator with a comprehensive understanding of what she plays, be it the intensity of the Fourth Suite, the balletic grandeur of the Sixth or the tragic demeanour of the Fifth. She has all options covered, and Pentatone has recorded her with impressive presence. Very strongly recommended.

**Rob Cowan**

*Selected comparisons:*

*Isserlis* (7/07) (HYPE) CDA67541/2

*Demenga* (1/18) (ECM) 481 3195

*Ma* (A/18) (SONY) 19075 85465-2

*Gerhardt* (4/19) (HYPE) CDA68261/2

*Bertrand* (A/19) (HARM) HMM90 2293/4

## JS Bach

*Orgelbüchlein*, BWV599-644

**Stephen Farr** *org*

Resonus © RES10259 (79' • DDD)

Played on the Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost organ of the Stadtkirche, Waltershausen, Germany



Stephen Farr continues his occasional Bach series for Resonus with the 46 short chorale preludes contained in the 'Little Organ Book', recorded on the

Trost organ of the Stadtkirche of Waltershausen, Germany.

Tobias Heinrich Gottfried Trost was an organ builder who was an almost exact contemporary of JS Bach, so the choice of instrument is historically appropriate even if, as Farr admits in his fascinating reflections on recording the *Orgelbüchlein*, the idea of sitting down and both playing and listening to all 46 preludes in one go would have struck Bach as 'a special sort of absurdity'. Nevertheless, Farr goes on to admit that, while his choice of varied registrations, fully detailed in the booklet, seems to run counter to ideas of authenticity, 'it would be a curious thing for a player not to explore the remarkable colours of the instrument'; especially since he describes the Waltershausen instrument as 'one of the wonders of the musical world'. Resonus's own photographs of the instrument which liberally adorn the booklet certainly support Farr's claim visually, while he himself justifies his statement from the aural perspective.

We are certainly presented with a generous range of sounds and colours from this instrument, all intimately captured in a recording that also catches quite a bit of action noise. Among the real gems are a humble Gedackt lovingly embraced by a Tremulant for *Christum wir*



GRAMOPHONE *Focus*

## CYPRIEN KATSARIS'S BEETHOVEN ODYSSEY

**Jeremy Nicholas** welcomes an unusual tribute to Beethoven's genius – one that spans the composer's output chronologically, presenting little-known gems and rare transcriptions alongside celebrated masterpieces



Cyprien Katsaris's antidote to complete box-sets offers a highly personal slant on Beethoven's output

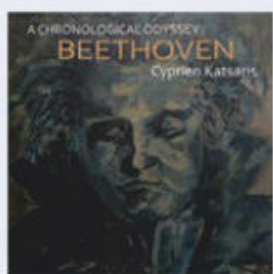
**Beethoven**

'A Chronological Odyssey'

Bagatelles, Op 33. Fantasia, Op 77. Piano Sonatas – No 1, Op 2 No 1; No 5, Op 10 No 1; No 10, Op 14 No 2; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 17, 'Tempest', Op 31 No 2; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 24, Op 78; No 32, Op 111; WoO47 No 1. Two Preludes, Op 39. Rondo a capriccio, 'Rage over a lost penny', Op 129. Variations on a March by Dressler, WoO63 and transcriptions by **Beethoven, Czerny, Diabelli, Mussorgsky, Wagner, Winkler** and others

**Cyprien Katsaris** *pf*

Piano 21 © © P21-060 (7h 6' • DDD)



A column in the March 2020 issue of *Gramophone's* stable companion

*International Piano* quoted a whopping 709 different recordings already currently available, in one form or another, of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 5, no fewer than 679 of the *Appassionata* Sonata

and, most recorded of all his works, the *Choral* Symphony (841) exceeded only by 923 of Symphony No 5. Significant birthdays are all very well, but how can the market sustain this glut?

This collection by Cyprien Katsaris comes as a welcome antidote to the box-sets of complete works, the complete this and the complete that (incidentally, it is 35 piano sonatas, not 32, if we include the three early sonatas, WoO47). It might also be seen as an addendum to Rob Cowan's masterly survey of well-known Beethoven works in lesser-known recordings which appeared in the April edition of this magazine. The French-Cypriot virtuoso is accustomed to thinking outside the box and has come up with the novel (so far as I know) idea of presenting a chronological programme of original Beethoven works and transcriptions (mainly by others). It's an attractive prospect both for Beethoven devotees – there are several little-known works included such as the Two Preludes, Op 39, for fortepiano or organ – and for repertoire junkies: you won't often

encounter the *Spring* and *Kreutzer* Violin Sonatas arranged for solo piano, or Wagner's transcription of the *Adagio* from the Ninth Symphony.

Katsaris begins with Beethoven's first published work, the 11-year-old's *Variations on a March by Dressler* (1782), followed soon after by his own solo version of *Music for a Knightly Ballet*, two works whose sole value is to show that not every work composed by a genius is a masterpiece. But within a short space of time we have the F minor Sonata, Op 2 No 1 (1794), *Rage over a lost penny* (1795) and a fascinating arrangement made in 1815 by either the composer or Diabelli of the String Trio, Op 3. Disc 2 ends with a thoroughly engaging account of the C minor Piano Sonata, Op 10 No 1 (1798), and its heart-tugging slow movement. It is preceded not by other early sonatas – as every other pianist would – but by transcriptions of the Rondo from the Cello Sonata No 2 and the Sonatina for mandolin and harpsichord (both 1796).

You will already be asking if the recording and performances are any



good. Katsaris is dismissed in some quarters as a lightweight. Whether it be due to his astonishing technical facility, his all-encompassing repertoire or his prolific recorded output I am not sure. Is it because he achieves all these things without any apparent difficulty? Because it all seems to come to him too easily? Personally, I am unable to see such fecundity and mastery in any negative way but rather as qualities to be celebrated. Katsaris captures the youthful zest of these early works wonderfully well. Moreover, he has been canny in his choice of piano (a warmly voiced Bechstein), recording location (Église Évangélique Saint-Marcel in Paris) and producer (Nikolaos Samaltanos). The piano in this acoustic is very easy on the ear. The record label, Piano 21, is the pianist's own, as are the most informative notes on the music. The whole project is the result of one man's vision. It helps.

All 26 works, with the exception of the *Moonlight* Sonata set down in 2016, were recorded in the summer of last year (incidentally, if you want to hear the last movement played *presto* and truly *agitato*, then you should not skip this just because it is over-played and over-recorded). The *Moonlight*, the Minuet movement from the Septet transcribed by Liszt (go to Leslie Howard on Hyperion for the whole work in this form), the *Appassionata*, 32 Variations in C minor and Op 111 are well known. Elsewhere you will encounter the *Adagio* from the String Quartet Op 18 No 6 (1800) transcribed by Saint-Saëns, as well as surprisingly convincing versions of the two great violin sonatas mentioned above (I love the way Katsaris handles the *Spring* Sonata's witty cat-and-mouse Scherzo). And who would not want to hear a solo transcription of the Rondo from the Violin Concerto (1806) with the cadenza Beethoven wrote for his own piano concerto version interpolated?

Chronologically, on the final disc Katsaris jumps from 1809 (the 'À Thérèse' Sonata, Op 78) to the Sonata in C minor, Op 111 of 1822, ending with Mussorgsky's transcription of the *Lento* movement from the String Quartet Op 135 (1826), and then what is described as 'the very last' vocal composition of Beethoven, written on December 3, 1826. This is a *musikalischer Scherz* ('musical joke') subtitled *Rätselkanon* ('riddle canon'). It consists of 13 notes and lasts just 43 seconds, as eccentric a way as any to round off this unique odyssey. **G**

*sollen loben schon*, a Nassad-quinta adding a creamy coating to a simple eight- and four-foot combination for *O Mensch, beweine dein Sünde gross*, a warm Viol d'Gambe for the second of the *Liebster Jesu, wir sind hier* preludes, a wonderfully festive *pleno* for *In dir ist Freude* and a beautifully bright and airy Brustwerk chorus for *Komm, Gott Schöpfer, heiliger Geist*.

It is unfair to expect any performer to get serious interpretative teeth into so many short and varied pieces, and Farr does not attempt to do anything more than present clean, positively paced performances of them. Perhaps there is a slightly over-mechanical tread to the pair of preludes on *Liebster Jesu* but otherwise he lets the organ do the talking, enticing the ear through well-chosen registrations. The result is a recording through which one can sit and listen from start to finish without any sense of irritation at the short-lived existence of each prelude. **Marc Rochester**

## Chopin

Études - Op 10; Op 25. Trois Nouvelles études

Sonya Bach *pf*

Rubicon © RCD1042 (64' • DDD)



Chopin may have brought the étude out of the practice room and into the salon but for some performers there's a sense that these are still above all technical exercises to be surmounted. That's the nagging feeling I had while listening to Sonya Bach's new recording. The very opening track, Op 10 No 1, has a kind of bullish virtuosity as if she's delighting in the physicality of this music without necessarily going beyond that. As the set progresses, there's a sense of sameness about her approach – the second, fourth, fifth and eighth, for instance, are all glittering but relentless, the third a moment of respite but with few of the colours or shadings that great pianists (such as Perahia and Freire) find. No 9 offers something more interesting, with a dialogue between the billowing lines, the close nicely ethereal. By the time we reach the final étude of the set we're back in auto-tempest mode.

Bach begins Op 25 with a promising shimmering quality to the harp-like notation, over which she brings out Chopin's scintillating countermelodies. And her high-flung scales just before the close of No 2 are given with vivacity. But the galloping figuration of No 3 seems to thwart her – she's not lacking in technique per se but musically seems unsure what to

do with it – bringing out this line and that but underplaying the piece's obsessive quality; Perahia, on the other hand, recolours it with a touch of pedal here, a change of phrasing there; Sokolov takes things further, rounding off the étude with a wonderfully deliquescent flourish.

And so it continues – the darting difficulties of No 5 are leaden alongside the glee and subtlety of Freire, while the glorious melody of the middle section lacks conviction in Bach's hands. Similarly, the extended lines of No 7 are timidly voiced, while No 9, though setting off at a good pace, finds its wings clipped by the overly prominent bass octaves (0'26"); Freire is much more readily airborne here. Octaves become an issue in No 10 too, where there's no lack of ferocity but either the acoustic or her pedalling result in a muddy sound, while the *Lento* section lacks a sense of line – how much more potent Sokolov is, building from a hushed fragility. There's no mistaking the dominant motif in the 11th, Bach ensuring it impinges relentlessly through the triplet semiquavers. And for the final étude we're simply back where we started with Op 10 No 1 – the arpeggios hard-edged and glittering. Her *Trois Nouvelles études* are no more satisfying – with a lack of singing line in the first and no magic in the guileless second, while the mercurial playfulness of the third gets lost in translation. **Harriet Smith**

Études, Opp 10 & 25 – selected comparisons:

Freire (8/02, A/05<sup>R</sup>) (DECC) ➔

470 288-2DH, 478 2181DH (oas)

Perahia (11/02<sup>R</sup>, 11/14) (SONY) 88843 06243-2

Études, Op 25 – selected comparison:

Sokolov (O111) OPS30-289

## Fauré

'In paradisum - A Fauré Recital, Vol 2'

Ballade, Op 19. Barcarolles - No 1, Op 26; No 10, Op 104 No 2; No 12, Op 106*bis*. Nocturnes - No 7, Op 74; No 10, Op 99; No 11, Op 104 No 1; No 13, Op 119. Requiem, Op 48 - In paradisum; Pie Jesu. Thème et variations, Op 73

Louis Lortie *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20149 (76' • DDD)



The second volume of Louis Lortie's series of Fauré recitals offers the kind of solace that repays repeated hearings, with the prospect of enjoyment increasing with each one.

As in the first volume, Lortie incorporates his own transcriptions of Fauré's best-known works, here the 'Pie Jesu' and the 'In paradisum' from the Requiem, each prepared and executed with



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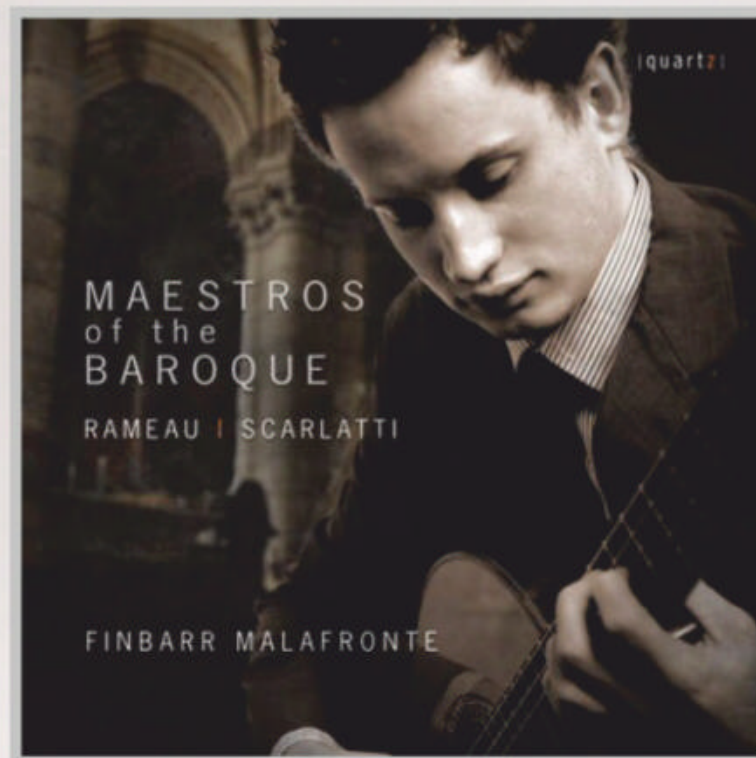
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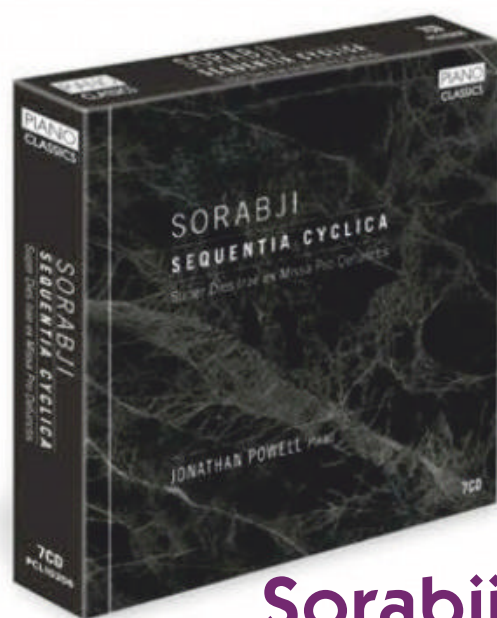
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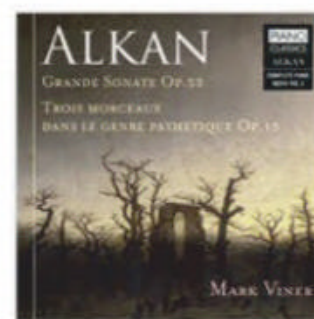
## Just some of the superb Piano Classics releases of 2020!



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Grande Sonate Op.33  
1CD PCL10209



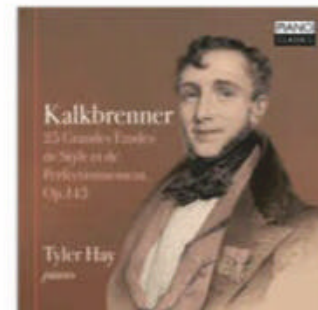
**Messiaen**  
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love and care. They bookend works from various periods of the composer's life, from the romantic early Ballade in F sharp minor to the enigmatic and unsettling Nocturne No 13, which was Fauré's farewell to piano solo music. Lortie injects each episode of the Ballade with youthful exuberance and lust for life, as much as he yearns for lost youth and life in the fervent pleas of the Nocturne. I still have a slight preference for the shy introversion Germaine Thyssens-Valentin brings to the opening (Testament, 8/02). But let's just accept that she is the unattainable zenith, the woman with direct access to the heart of Fauré's music.

Here and elsewhere I have some reservations about the immediacy of the Fazioli, and I wonder whether Lortie's poetry might have resonated even better through a warmer and more rounded piano sound. But he certainly makes a much better case for the instrument than Angela Hewitt (Hyperion, 9/13). Where Hewitt plods through the Theme of the C sharp minor Theme and Variations, Lortie endows it with a sense of inevitability and goes on to bring far greater coherence and drama to the piece as a whole.

On the other hand, it might be said that the very unevenness of the Fazioli serves to enhance the unpredictability of Fauré's musical language. Lortie certainly excels in giving the illusion of continuous improvisation; take the unexpected harmonic glides in the Barcarolle No 12, which in his hands sound as natural complements to the rocking rhythm, as if the harmony is shifting with the gondolier's strokes. Compare this to Pierre-Alain Volondat's erratic rendition (Naxos, 11/96), where the limping rhythm is slanted to the point of mockery. It is Lortie's sincerity and naturalness, infused with the utmost sensitivity and a wide colouristic palette, that makes him a star shining only a fraction less brightly than the un eclipsed Thyssens-Valentin.

Michelle Assay

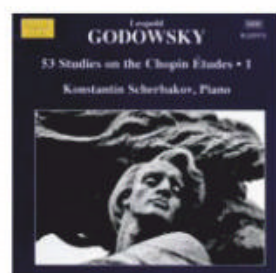
## Godowsky

'Piano Music, Vol 14'

53 Studies on Chopin's Études, Vol 1

Konstantin Scherbakov *pf*

Marco Polo 8 225372 (79' • DDD)



The finishing tape of Konstantin Scherbakov's Godowsky marathon

is in sight. His project to record the complete works began back in 1996

but he has waited until now to tackle what are arguably the most musically and technically daunting of Godowsky's entire oeuvre: the *53 Studies on Chopin's Études* published between 1894 and 1914.

He is only the fifth pianist to record the entire set (assuming there is a second volume coming at some point), the others being Geoffrey Douglas Madge, Carlo Grante, Marc-André Hamelin and Emanuele Delucchi. Discounting Madge's account because of its many shortcomings, what, in the first place, distinguishes Scherbakov's new recording from its three competitors is that rather than play all 53 Chopin-Godowsky studies in sequence as they do, he has chosen to play just one Godowsky version of each of the 27 Chopin studies in order – Op 10 Nos 1-12, Op 25 Nos 1-12, *Trois Nouvelles études*. This avoids the (to me at least) enervating experiences of seven different versions of Op 10 No 5 in succession and four (or five, depending on whether you admit *ossia* readings as separate studies) of Op 25 No 2 one after the other.

Without laboriously commenting on each of the 25 studies on this volume (Keith Anderson's booklet whisks you through each study's genesis clearly and economically), three other points contribute to what is an outstanding release. The opening piece is Godowsky's Study No 1, based on Chopin's Op 10 No 1, in which the right-hand arpeggios of Chopin's original are transferred to the left hand, while equally demanding arpeggios in contrary motion are given to the right hand. It's a majestic concept which, from the very opening bars, plays well with the muscular, weighty tone of Scherbakov's conception of the studies.

There is a similar sparkle and panache on show throughout this disc, and many of the studies are played with the relish of an end-of-concert encore, individually tailored to stagger and delight an audience. That does not mean that Scherbakov eschews the lyrical elements of Godowsky's re-creations. Try Study No 5, which is the 'Tristesse' Étude transferred into D flat and played by the left hand alone (though you wouldn't know it).

The second point, complementing Scherbakov's total command of the material, is the depth and richness of the piano tone, recorded at the Wyastone Concert Hall by producer, engineer and editor John Taylor, a very different listening experience to the Wyastone sound in days of old.

Hamelin's benchmark recording was made over 20 years ago. It remains an outstanding achievement in the recorded

history of the piano. Scherbakov offers an utterly compelling alternative with all the benefits mentioned above, a fine tribute in Godowsky's sesquicentenary year.

Jeremy Nicholas

*Selected comparisons:*

Grante (10/96, 10/98) (ALTA) AIR-CD9092/3

Hamelin (5/00) (HYPE) CDA67411/12

Delucchi (A/17, 6/19) (PICL) PCL0122, PCL10182

## Mozart

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas – No 10, K330; No 11, K331; No 18, K576. Adagio, K540. Gigue, K574

Peter Donohoe *pf*

Somm 8 SOMMCD0613 (65' • DDD)



While certain pianists approach Mozart sonatas in the manner of visual artists who

favour pastels and subtle hues, Peter Donohoe often applies primary colours in broad brushstrokes. Virility and propulsion dominate K330's outer movements, where phrases transpire in long lines that occasionally rush ahead in anticipation of their final destination, consequently pushing the tension up a notch. By contrast, Donohoe's full-throated yet stylistically contained *Andante cantabile* corroborates the composer's essentially operatic DNA. At first it seems that Donohoe's holding back the D major K576's opening *Allegro* signifies caution, yet his tempo choice allows the embellishments more wiggle-room to speak and breath. He downplays the Rondo theme's potential for triteness by focusing attention on the left hand, especially the superbly articulated downward runs.

The A major K331's theme-and-variations first movement seems to play itself by virtue of Donohoe's simplicity, grace and insidious tempo relationships. He rightly feels the central Menuetto in one beat to a bar, while projecting a conversational contour between both hands. The 'Rondo alla turca' may strike some as too jaunty for a bona fide *Allegretto*. Yet Donohoe avoids glibness by not being afraid to roughen up his tone when warranted and giving accents an extra emphatic kick, such as on the up-beats that lead into the second theme (0'41").

Donohoe reveals the great B minor *Adagio*'s intense expressive points through intelligent attention to voice-leading, rather than imposing the weight of the world on to the music. And the little G major Gigue takes wonderful wing



as Donohoe slyly shifts points of balance and emphasis on the repeats, while bringing out Mozart's brilliant, vertigo-inducing cross-rhythmic effects. Christopher Morley's excellent booklet notes and Somm's robust engineering enhance my recommendation, and I look forward to this Mozart sonata cycle's further instalments. **Jed Distler**

## Schubert

**Allegro, 'Lebensstürme', D947. Fantasie, D940. Rondos - D608; D951. Sonata, D617**

**Duo Pleyel**

Linn © CKD593 (77' • DDD)



Schubert's piano duets on period instruments are still – perhaps surprisingly –

relatively thin on the ground, so it's good to have Richard Egarr teaming up with Alexandra Nepomnyashchaya in a duo named in honour of their 1848 Pleyel.

The recital begins with the guileless D major Rondo, D608, a rarity on record, in which the Pleyel's crystalline treble is shown to good effect. But on this occasion the piece slightly overstays its welcome – Goldstone and Clemmow, at a slightly faster pace, find more wit within it. And there's further unusual fare in the Sonata in B flat, D617. They bring grace to the first movement but at times the accompaniment seems a touch too prominent, something that also dogs the finale. In between, they opt for a relatively slow tempo for the *Andante con moto*, giving it a more halting quality than Goldstone and Clemmow.

From the obscure to Schubert's best-loved duet, the haunting F minor Fantasy. Here the greatest doubts arose, for the haloed opening has little of the magic that the best can find, partly due to an overly prominent accompaniment. Richter and Britten are endlessly subtle at a pretty swift pace, while Lupu and Perahia are for many simply matchless. Here, Nepomnyashchaya and Egarr do have period-instrument competition in the form of Staier and Melnikov on a beautifully husky-toned copy of a Graf (taking us down in pitch). Theirs is a much more reactive account of the Fantasy, from the most hushed moments to climaxes of real violence that bring the music more thrillingly alive than this new version.

However, we're on surer ground with the remaining two pieces. The transparency and varied tonal colours of the Pleyel are particularly effective in the D951 Rondo, which they imbue with plenty of charm,

with a notably warm account of the main theme. Lewis and Osborne favour a greater songfulness, while Pires and Castro imbue it with an urgent narrative – choice will really come down to personal taste. In the A minor *Allegro*, D947, Duo Pleyel find the drama that has been lacking elsewhere, the contrast with the hushed writing here very telling. That drive is maintained right up to the close, the final two chords ending the disc in a mood of heroic defiance.

**Harriet Smith**

*Piano Duos – selected comparison:*

Goldstone, Clemmow (DIVI) DDA21701

*Fantasie, D940 – selected comparisons:*

Lupu, Perahia (3/86<sup>R</sup>) (SONY)

SK39511 or 88697 85811-2

Britten, Richter (8/00) (DECC) 466 822-2DM

*Fantasie, D940, Rondo, D951 – selected comparison:*

Staier, Melnikov (7/17) (HARM) HMM90 2227

*Allegro, D947, Fantasie, D940, Rondo, D951 –*

*selected comparison:*

Lewis, Osborne (12/10) (HYPE) CDA67665

## Scriabin

**Complete Mazurkas.**

**Impromptu à la mazur, Op 2 No 3**

**Peter Jablonski** *pf*

Ondine © ODE1329-2 (77' • DDD)



To an already robust discography, Peter Jablonski adds a disc encompassing most

of Scriabin's Mazurkas. They span the composer's life from around 1884, the presumed date of the very early B minor Mazurka, to the two Op 40 Mazurkas from 1903, contemporaneous with the Fourth Sonata. Jablonski, the Swedish pianist who turns 49 this year, has historically maintained a great deal of Russian music in his repertoire. And as the son of a Polish father, his commitment to the music of Poland extends from Chopin and Szymanowski to Maciejewski, Kilar and Lutosławski. Surely these are excellent qualifications for the interpretation of fine Scriabin Mazurkas?

And indeed they are. Jablonski brings extraordinary finesse to these dances, imbuing them with an unmistakable *Weltschmerz* that perfectly conjures the *fin de siècle*. From the first cut, the deft handling of the snappy ornaments of the B minor Mazurka (Op 3 No 10) is an indication that Jablonski's approach is nothing if not idiomatic. The plaintive *cantabile* of G minor (Op 3 No 2) is one instance of the delicacy of sentiment that pervades these performances; the unspeakable sadness of E minor (Op 20

No 3) is another. And it shouldn't be assumed that the musical pleasures here are restricted to miniatures. The last Mazurka of Op 3 lasts a full six and a half minutes, unfolding a rather involved narrative.

Of special interest are the two Op 40 Mazurkas, written on the threshold of Scriabin's late period. They have a very different feel from their predecessors, certainly lighter in mood and perhaps more cosmopolitan.

There are occasions when one might wish for greater dynamic contrasts, until realising that would necessarily rob these superb performances of a good deal of their subtlety and understated charm. There's much to enjoy here. **Patrick Rucker**

## Grigory Sokolov

**Beethoven Bagatelles, Op 119<sup>a</sup>. Piano Sonatas - No 3, Op 2 No 3<sup>b</sup>; No 27, Op 90<sup>d</sup>; No 32, Op 111<sup>d</sup>**

**Brahms Piano Pieces: Op 117 No 2<sup>c</sup>; Op 118<sup>c</sup>;**

**Op 119<sup>c</sup> Chopin Nocturnes<sup>d</sup> - No 9, Op 32 No 1;**

**No 10, Op 32 No 2 Debussy Préludes: Book 1 -**

**No 6, Des pas sur la neige<sup>a</sup>; Book 2 - No 10,**

**Canope<sup>d</sup> Mozart Fantasia, K475<sup>d</sup>. Piano**

**Sonatas<sup>d</sup> - No 14, K457; No 16, K545**

**Rachmaninov Prelude, Op 32 No 12<sup>b</sup>**

**Rameau L'Indiscrète<sup>d</sup>. Le rappel des oiseaux<sup>b</sup>.**

**Les Sauvages<sup>c</sup> Schubert Allegretto, D915.**

**Impromptu, D935 No 2. Moment musical,**

**D780 No 1<sup>d</sup> Schumann Arabesque, Op 18<sup>d</sup>**

**Grigory Sokolov** *pf*

DG © ③ (② + DVD) 483 6570

(146' + 139' • DDD • NTSC)

<sup>d</sup>DVD performance, recorded live at the

Auditorium Giovanni Agnelli del Lingotto,

Turin, 2017

CD recorded live at the <sup>a</sup>Historische Stadthalle

Wuppertal, June 14, 2019; <sup>b</sup>Mozart Hall of the

Auditorio de Zaragoza, June 20, 2019; <sup>c</sup>Church

of San Bernardo in Rabbi, August 8, 2019



Sometimes I think I've been unlucky with my experiences of Sokolov, so mixed have my impressions been from both live performances and recordings.

The Beethoven CD here gives me at least something of what I feel I have been missing: which is to say, not just the familiar orchestral range of volume and timbre, the exceptional rhythmic control, the superior articulation, the furious energy and drive, but also a subtlety of weighting and a sense of fantasy at precisely the appropriate structural moments (the end of the Op 2 No 3 Sonata's slow movement is a special case in point; he has a momentary brain-freeze in the opening bar of this movement, but in live performance that



is entirely forgivable). Sokolov respects the pedal markings that even some specialists shy away from (as in the third Bagatelle) and even when his accents border on the excessive, there is sanction in the score. Warning bells nevertheless sound at times, especially in the Bagatelles. The *risoluto* of No 5 is amplified to the point of brutality, for instance, and the urge towards hyper-characterisation feels in places more like Prokofievian caricature than Beethoven.

Sokolov's tendency to smother more intimate numbers in a blanket of affection becomes more seriously problematic in Brahms. Everything here is so over-inflected that it tends to come across as merely spasmodic: the nuances as though applied from outside rather than arising from the music itself, the rhythms more hobbling and hesitant than flowing and expressive. I tried my darnedest to give this approach the benefit of the doubt but by the time I reached Op 119 it had become unbearable. Here the first Intermezzo feels suffocating in its embrace, the *agitato* of the second demonstrates a weird idea of *un poco*, the *grazioso* of the third sounds mannered and the last is once again overblown in its uber-*risoluto*.

The CDs are recorded in three different venues and the Brahms pieces are greatly inferior in quality to the rest, the sound being diffuse and cloudy. Having said that, there is unquestionable distinction in some of the encores, above all in the melancholy of 'Des pas sur la neige'.

But then there is the DVD, which is something of a revelation. For one thing the camera angles – tastefully and intelligently used – put the mechanics of Sokolov's exceptional technique under the spotlight. To the trained eye they show how he uses all the 'levers' – from the body through to the fingertips – to prepare the sound, to transfer the weight from one note to the next and to guarantee clarity, power and nuance. For another thing, the performance of Beethoven's Op 111 is outstanding in any terms: for its peerless articulation, its unremitting intensity and its fine pacing (no trace here of the lazy misreading of tempo relations in the variations that has so often provoked my pique in these pages). The Op 90 Sonata is also deeply impressive in an austere, uncompromising way that never seeks to ingratiate.

The same virtues applied to Mozart and Chopin may win fewer admirers. Sokolov's obsessive investment of every note with meaning, combined with his bell-like sonority, can render the effect paradoxically 'notey', at the same as it is technically phenomenal. Once again, though, there

are breathtaking things in the encores, and once again it is the Debussy ('Canope') to which I unreservedly surrender.

David Fanning

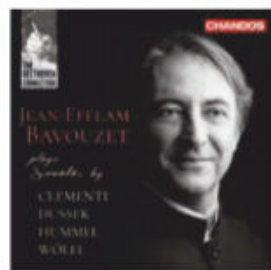
## 'The Beethoven Connection'



**Clementi Piano Sonata, Op 50 No 1 Dussek Piano Sonata, 'Élégie harmonique sur la mort de son Altesse Royale le prince Louis-Ferdinand de Prusse', Op 61 C211 Hummel Piano Sonata No 3, Op 20 Wölfl Piano Sonata, Op 33 No 3**

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet *pf*

Chandos © CHAN20128 (83' • DDD)



Jean-Efflam

Bavouzet has chosen a particularly happy way to celebrate

Beethoven this year. Rather than more Beethoven, of which Bavouzet has already given us an ample supply with complete sets of sonatas and concertos, why not dip into outstanding sonatas by his lesser-known contemporaries? No artist exists in a vacuum and certainly Beethoven was no exception. Here Bavouzet invites us to listen comparatively for influences, as well as for elements of piano-writing that were common to them all.

Joseph Wölfl's delightful E major Sonata from 1805 is all clarity and gentility, with a logical flow of plentiful ideas more prone to charm than to challenge or surprise. In the *Andante cantabile*, Bavouzet gives full vent to Wölfl's unabashedly operatically inspired writing. Even the extended *minore* section of the Rondo finale seems more playful than dramatic. Clementi, whose piano sonatas Beethoven is said to have valued above those of Mozart, is represented by one of the three Op 50 Sonatas. Not published until 1821, it nevertheless seems clear that this wonderful sonata was complete by 1809, around the time of Clementi and Beethoven's closest interactions.

Czerny tells us that, as pianists, Beethoven and Hummel inspired vociferous partisanship among the Viennese musical public. In Hummel's overtly virtuoso Op 20 Sonata from 1807, Bavouzet's focus is on its extraordinary pathos and startlingly original formal procedures. Jan Ladislav Dussek was in service to the Prussian Prince Louis Ferdinand, even accompanying him on campaign at the time of his death during the Napoleonic wars. Dussek's response was the 'harmonic elegy' heard here, a two-movement sonata published in 1807. Bavouzet displays great finesse in both the

extended fantasy, rich with contrasting affects, and the driven finale marked *vivace e con fuoco*.

Bavouzet's keen intelligence and pristine musicianship are evident throughout, not least in his vivid delineation of the individual characters of these four composer-pianists. A generous 12-minute bonus track compares various details of their work with one another and with Beethoven. **Patrick Rucker**

## 'Kromos'

**Aho Solo XI Alakotila Psalm Fagerlund Kromos Mustonen Sonata No 2 Tan Dun Seven Desires Tiensuu Daydreams**

Ismo Eskelinen *gtr*

BIS © BIS2395 (61' • DDD/DSD)



A kind of study for his 2013 guitar concerto *Transit*, *Kromos* is Sebastian

Fagerlund's way of exploring his own and the guitar's capabilities. In that sense, it is both essay and étude, repeated motifs testing the borders beyond the thickets of strums, slaps and scales.

It's also a wonderful way for the versatile Finnish guitarist Ismo Eskelinen to open this recital of 21st-century guitar music. Which, taken as a whole, one could hear as an essay in how readily the guitar assimilates disparate styles while honouring their differences. This is partly in the nature of the guitar's construction. Strummed chords, fast arpeggios and tremolo are easier than sustained melodies and polyphonic textures. Yet heart and head are here in abundance, the toccata their implicit shared sign.

Eskelinen captures well Aho's respectful orientalism and intense feeling for space and mode, while proving Mustonen's dramatic Second Sonata for solo guitar is, despite the composer's words to the contrary, no more 'abstract' than the earlier work, which 'drew inspiration from the world of Finnish myths'. Under Eskelinen's fingers, Tan Dun's *Seven Desires* becomes an erotic dance between flamenco guitar and pipa, perhaps even between yang and yin, the shared base language of tremolo and mode set alight with bent pitches, percussive gestures, trills and rapid scales. How apt that the pointillistic flurries and textures of Tiensuu's following *Daydreams* for guitar and electronics should find the guitar dancing with its self-replicating doppelgänger. And after all the passion is spent, peace drops slow in Eskelinen's beautiful arrangement of Alakotila's *Psalm*.

William Yeoman



# Alexander Goehr

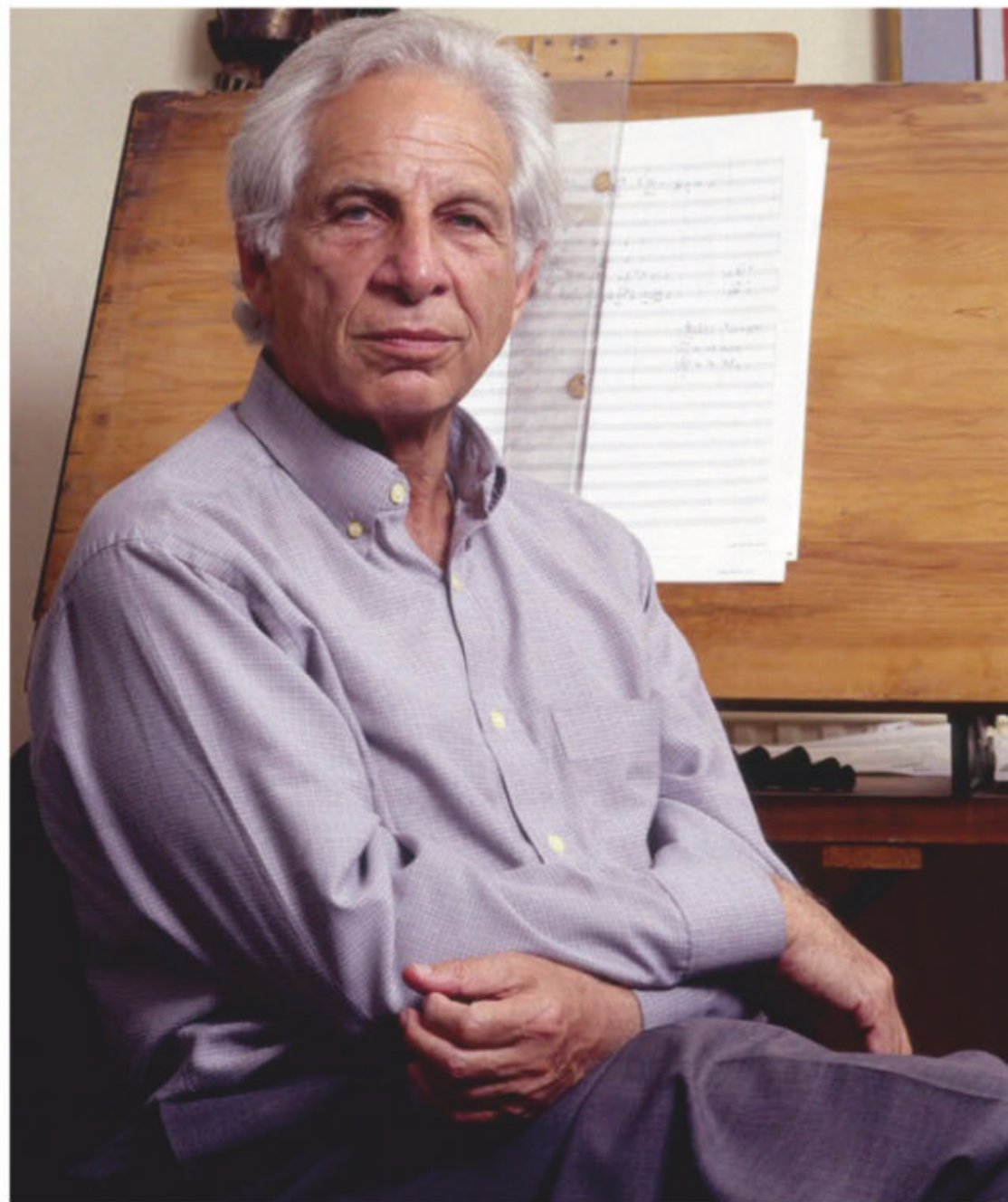
The German-born British composer and academic deserves greater attention – and more recordings, says **Richard Whitehouse**

Perhaps it's surprising that Alexander Goehr is not currently better represented in terms of recording. But then, Goehr has never been a 'fashionable' composer – even when the modernism he supposedly represented was the driving force in British music during the 1960s and '70s. Among his contemporaries at the then Royal Manchester College of Music, he lacked the distinctive profile of Peter Maxwell Davies or Harrison Birtwistle, both of whom dominated (at different times) the UK contemporary scene with their differing yet equally distinctive idioms. His music has never lacked for individuality, yet his methodical outlook – indebted while never in thrall to those European figures who charted the course of Western music in the earlier 20th century – often attracts listeners almost despite itself.

Whether through those aesthetic antagonisms of Schoenberg and Stravinsky, the harmonic innovations of Messiaen, or his own radical yet highly pragmatic adaptation of late Baroque figured-bass practice as a means of eliding between serial and modal elements, Goehr has never been afraid to place the historical in direct confrontation with the polemical – a stance that has also characterised his commitment to teaching composition, as well as those numerous essays and lecture series that have emerged in parallel to his ongoing creative endeavours.

*I hope that his operas will enjoy revivals so as to find the wider audience such absorbing dramatic conceptions warrant*

Where to start exploring Goehr's music is influenced not only by insufficient availability but also by the size of his output, which now extends to more than a hundred opuses covering all the major genres with little or no repetition of approach. From among his six stage works, the only one so far recorded is *Arianna* (1994-95), which exemplifies his instinctive reactivity: its libretto, by Ottavio Rinuccini, was written in 1608 for a now-lost opera (except for a single aria) by Monteverdi, whose music permeates this score at both structural and expressive levels. Premiered in 1995, at a time when postmodernism had largely abandoned any provocative intent, Goehr's profound reimagining of a past aesthetic by eschewing mere imitation or caricature can be heard as a warning that should have been heeded. It is to be hoped that his remaining operas – such as the powerful fusion between baroque and modernist elements that is *Behold the Sun* (1981-84), or the concentrated and fatalistic (but never despairing) retelling of the King Lear story *Promised End* (2008-09) – will enjoy revivals so as to find the wider audience



such contrasted yet equally absorbing dramatic conceptions undoubtedly warrant.

There are other, no less significant means by which to chart Goehr's progress away from the relative impasse that total serialism reached during the latter 1950s towards a more open and pluralistic, if never reactionary, musical idiom. One way is through his series of choral works, starting with *The Deluge* (1957-58), as much indebted to the gestural immediacy of Prokofiev's Soviet-era choral music as to the hermetic integration of Webern's late cantatas. The complexity of its successor *Sutter's Gold* (1959-60) may have alienated performers and listeners alike at its premiere, but Goehr soon turned this to his advantage in *Two Choruses* (1962; after Milton and Shakespeare), which, with their rigorous yet unforced interplay of serial and modal procedures, predicated much of what followed over the next 14 years up to his setting of Psalm IV (1976) – whose 'white note' serialism brought elements from the Renaissance into an arresting new context. This in turn provided the template for *Babylon the Great Is Fallen* (1979) and *The Death of Moses* (1991-92), which in their different ways recreate the Baroque allegorical cantata from a vividly contemporary perspective. Choral music may have featured less prominently since then, but the luminous textures of *Broken Psalm* (2009) or the plangent writing for children's choir of *To These Dark Steps / The Fathers Are Watching* (2011-12) could only have come from a sensibility beholden to the present.

With any luck, one of the more enquiring younger ensembles will tackle Goehr's string quartets, now extending over almost the entirety of his output and thus offering a viable overview of his evolution across six decades. From the densely serial First



## GOEHR FACTS

**1932** Born Berlin, August 10, son of conductor-composer Walter Goehr

**1952-55** Studies composition with Richard Hall at Royal Manchester College of Music. Founds New Music Manchester Group with Harrison Birtwistle, Peter Maxwell Davies, Elgar Howarth and John Ogdon

**1955-56** Attends Messiaen's class at Paris Conservatoire; studies counterpoint with Yvonne Loriod

**1957-60** Works in London as freelance editor and translator

**1960-68** Producer of orchestral concerts at BBC

**1964-65** Organises Wardour Castle Summer School of Music with Birtwistle and Maxwell Davies

**1968-70** Teaches at New England Conservatory then Yale University

**1971-76** Professor and head of music at University of Leeds

**1973** Hon DMus, Southampton University

**1976-99** Professor of music at University of Cambridge

**1987** Gives BBC Reith Lectures: 'The Survival of the Symphony'

**1994** Hon DMus: universities of Manchester and Nottingham

**2012** Publication of book *Fings Ain't Wot They Used t'Be* by Akademie der Künste, Berlin

**2013** Featured composer at Festival Messiaen au Pays de la Meije, France

(1956-57), via the renewed rhythmic definition of the Second (1967) and formal clarity of the Third (1975-76), to the inward retrospection of the Fourth (1990) and metaphysical musing of the Fifth (*Vision of the Soldier Er*; 2018), and not forgetting the quirky interplay of string quartet with percussion in *Since Brass, nor Stone, nor Earth, nor Boundless Sea* (2008), this cycle of quartets places its composer's ongoing preoccupations firmly in the context of those that inform much of post-war European music – an evolution more absorbing for its refusal to provide easy answers to simplified problems.

Chamber music, in all its varied formations, has been a mainstay of Goehr's writing since his earliest years – as, too, has that for piano. The formal ingenuity and expressive vibrancy of his Piano Sonata in one movement (in memory of Prokofiev; 1951-52) was followed by the knotty abstraction of Capriccio (1957) then the gritty immediacy of Three Pieces (1964), which, along with the elaborate fantasy *Nonomiya* (1969), was inspired by the artistry of John Ogdon. Subsequent piano works have tended towards cycles of mutually related pieces –

whether the polyrhythmic subtleties of *...In Real Time* (1988-92) or the compendium of keyboard 'homages' which is *Symmetry Disorders Reach* (2002; composed for Huw Watkins); but there is also the relaxed if concentrated inventiveness of his Variations ('Homage to Haydn'; composed for Kirill Gerstein).

Concertante works, a significant feature of Goehr's output, have been written for a roster of distinguished soloists: the Violin Concerto (1961-62) for Manoug Parikian, the Romanza (1968) for Jacqueline du Pré and the Piano Concerto (1972) for Daniel Barenboim. The later pieces *Schlussgesang* (1996), written for Tabea Zimmermann, and *Marching to Carcassonne* (2002, rev 2005), for the late Peter Serkin, are more exploratory in their overall cohesion, and however abstract their overall content might appear they are always predicating expressive freedom.

Works for orchestra are even more prominent, and though Goehr has avoided a symphonic cycle as such, a symphonic dimension is seldom absent. This can take the guise of attraction between opposites in the combative *Symphony in One Movement* (1969, rev 1981), interrelation of otherwise contrasted movements in Sinfonia (1979), or reappraisal of

the formal archetype in the powerfully cumulative *Symphony with Chaconne* (1985-86) – its conceptual opposite encountered in the visceral 'symphonic fragment' of *Colossos or Panic* (1991-92). Framing these, the *Little Symphony* (1963; written in memory of Goehr's conductor-composer father) elides its diverse movements into a seamless but never passive continuity; this was an approach mirrored 50 years on by the chamber symphony *...Between the Lines / ...Zwischen den Zeilen* (2013), which likewise honours its Schoenbergian antecedents.

Now in his late eighties, Goehr remains a potent creative figure. Among his most recent works, the instrumental quintet *After 'The Waking'* (2016-17) takes lines from a poem by Theodore Roethke as the starting point for five movements that unfold a thoughtful and often eloquent polyphony, while *The Master Said* (2016) draws on Confucius in a sequence (for narrator and chamber orchestra) of seven adagios followed by an allegro in what amounts to a 'seven last words' – Haydnesque in spirit if not in essence. Whereas such unashamed referencing of the past might at one time have seemed to betray doubt or indecision, now this can be seen as its composer coming full circle in seeking a creative equilibrium between past and present. This equilibrium may have received less than its due over recent years, but its integrity and purpose will surely prove its greatest strength. **G**

*For Goehr's perceptive observations as author and lecturer, see Finding the Key: Selected Writings of Alexander Goehr (Faber, 1997). For information on all aspects of his output, go to <https://en.schott-music.com/shop/autoren/alexander-goehr>*

## RECOMMENDED GOEHR RECORDINGS

A selection showcasing the composer's range of output

**Arianna**

Ruby Philogene *sop* Angela Hickey *mez* Juliet Schiemann  
*sop* Lawrence Zazzo *counterten* Timothy Dawkins *bass*  
Arianna Ensemble / William Lacey  
NMC (9/98)

Goehr's composing of this lost opera from 1608 was no retrenchment but the vital re-creation of one era for another, and thereby a questioning of the true nature of musical 'authenticity'.

**Colossos or Panic. The Deluge. Little Symphony**

Claire Booth *sop* Hilary Summers *contr* BCMG,  
AskolSchönberg Ensemble, BBC SO / Oliver Knussen  
NMC

In this varied overview, two of Goehr's most enduring earlier pieces are coupled with the 'symphonic fragment' *Colossos or Panic*, which highlights his often overlooked orchestral panache.

**Symmetry Disorders Reach**

Huw Watkins *pf*  
Wergo (10/07)

Seemingly in the lineage of piano-cycles from the Romantic period, this set ingeniously extends the remit to reference compendious cycles from the Baroque and modern eras.

**Marching to Carcassonne. Pastorals. When Adam Fell**

Peter Serkin *pf* London Sinfonietta, BBC SO / Oliver Knussen  
Naxos (3/13)

This is a wide-ranging anthology of later pieces in which the formal rigour of Goehr's thinking is judiciously balanced by the expressive eloquence that has become a hallmark of his maturity.



# Vocal



**Andrew Mellor hears English music from Westminster Abbey:**  
*'Parry's Songs of Farewell represent the most remarkable meeting of English choral style with sheer instinct'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 69**



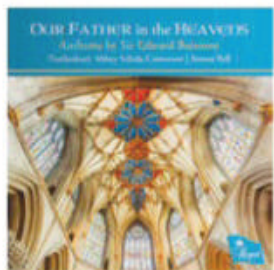
**Tim Ashley admires an ambitious programme from Anna Prohaska:**  
*'Line and dynamic control are everything in an aria from Das Paradies und die Peri, which is as exquisite as it is sorrowful'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 72**

## Bairstow



**'Our Father in the Heavens'**

Blessed city, heavenly Salem. The Blessed Virgin's Cradle Song. If the Lord had not helped me. Jesu, grant me this I pray. The king of love my shepherd is. The Lamentation. Let all mortal flesh keep silence. Lord, I call upon thee. Lord, thou hast been our refuge. Of the Father's love begotten. Our Father in the heavens. Save us, O Lord. Though I speak with the tongues of men  
**Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum / Simon Bell with Carleton Etherington** *org*  
Regent © REGCD543 (72' • DDD)



With our cathedral, abbey and church choirs so sadly silenced and the future of their

cultural inheritance under threat, it is good that Regent Records can remind us of some of this precious glory with an impressive survey of anthems by one of the pivotal figures in early 20th-century British choral music, Edward Cuthbert Bairstow (1874-1946). Raised in a strict Methodist family in Huddersfield, a Freemason and master Meccano hobbyist, Bairstow was renowned for his bluntness, especially with amateur choruses. A key figure in the raising of choral standards, particularly in the north of England during his long 33-year tenure at York Minster, he can be considered one of the most significant composers of anthems since SS Wesley. Here are about half of his output of anthems, including two premiere recordings.

The Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum open a splendid disc with the best-known, *Blessed city, heavenly Salem*, a series of variations on the plainsong hymn 'Urbs beata Hierusalem', given here in a typically impassioned performance. Bairstow's fondness for variation form also informs *Of the Father's love begotten* and *Lord, thou hast been our refuge*, this latter painted on a large emotional canvas. How one craves the original orchestral accompaniment. The unaccompanied pieces fare particularly well, especially

the disc's title-track, *Our Father in the heavens* (1932), and the introit *Let all mortal flesh* (1906), both of which demand vocal stamina and perfect pitching. In comparison to the Westminster Abbey Choir's disc of music by Bairstow, Harris and Stanford (Hyperion, 6/19), the Tewkesbury choristers have the edge, with their vitality of tone, clarity of diction and willingness to stir up the underlying dramatic impetus.

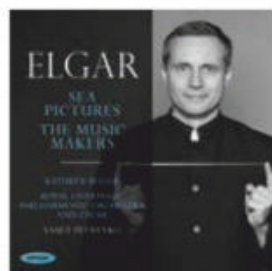
As with Warlock's song piano accompaniments, Bairstow's organ parts are masterpieces in their own right, chock-full of colour and sumptuous quasi-orchestral detail. Carleton Etherington clearly relishes the challenge, totally at one with choir director Simon Bell.

Let us hear more Bairstow from these wonderful executants. It is also high time that his exquisite violin Variations of 1916 (composed for Sibyl Eaton) were commercially recorded. **Malcolm Riley**

## Elgar



**The Music Makers, Op 69<sup>a</sup>. Sea Pictures, Op 37**  
**Kathryn Rudge** *mez* **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic**  
**<sup>a</sup>Choir and Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko**  
Onyx © ONYX4206 (66' • DDD • T)



I was much taken with Kathryn Rudge's contribution to Barry Wordsworth's

BBC CO anthology of orchestral songs by Elgar (Somm, 11/18), and this glowingly idiomatic account of *Sea Pictures* can only enhance her growing reputation. With her sensitivity to the text, freshness of timbre and secure vocal technique, she once again proves herself a strongly intuitive interpreter of this repertoire. Rudge is also fortunate to receive superbly attentive support from Vasily Petrenko and the RLPO, who are marvellously alive to the myriad textural subtleties and absorbing motivic interplay throughout Elgar's illimitably rewarding orchestral canvas. My sole tiny gripe? Personally, I always

hanker after the optional organ that adds such beguiling lustre to the culmination of 'Sabbath Morning at Sea'. No matter, a *Sea Pictures* that rises in my estimation every time I return to it, and a worthy addition to digital-era versions from Sarah Connolly (on Naxos and Chandos, 12/06 and 11/14), Alice Coote (Hallé, 11/15) and Marie-Nicole Lemieux (Erato, A/19). I'm assuming you already possess the peerless Baker/Barbirolli collaboration (EMI/Warner, 12/65).

If anything, there's even more to admire in the main offering, a deeply humane, unaffected and nobly integrated traversal of *The Music Makers* that all but matches Andrew Davis's distinguished Chandos remake (12/18) in terms of poetic instinct, keen temperament and sheer emotional clout. Under Petrenko's malleable lead the joint RLPO forces give of their fervent, articulate best: to experience them operating at full throttle try from 3'28" in track 10 ('And therefore today is thrilling / With a past day's late fulfilling'); and what memorably rapt hush they distil in that unforgettably moving passage beginning at 2'25" in track 11 ('A little apart from ye') with its achingly wistful juxtaposition of themes from the Violin Concerto and *The Apostles*. Rudge, too, covers herself in glory, not least in the incomparably tender setting of 'But on one man's soul it has broken / A light that doth not depart' (track 10, from 1'16"), where the appearance of 'Nimrod' pays compassionate tribute to Elgar's dear friend, August Jaeger. And towards the end (from 1'01" in track 13, to be precise), how affecting is Rudge's refulgent delivery of 'Bring us hither your sun and your summers / And renew our world as of yore; / You shall teach us your song's new numbers', not to mention her closing phrase 'Yea, in spite of a dreamer who slumbers / And a singer who sings no more', where Elgar weaves in one final, devastatingly poignant quotation of 'Novissima hora est' from *Gerontius*. No question about it, Petrenko's abundantly communicative conception demands to be heard.





Impassioned performances: the Tewkesbury Abbey Schola Cantorum remind of the glories of the Anglican choral tradition with a fine album of Bairstow

The digital album includes, by way of a bonus, a terrific *Pomp and Circumstance* March No 1 – swaggering, songful and ripely engineered. A most enticing release, in sum, which all Elgarians should seek out without delay. **Andrew Achenbach**

## Handel

'Messiah ... Refreshed!'

Messiah, HWV56 (arr Goossens)

**Penelope Shumate** *sop* **Claudia Chapa** *mez* **John McVeigh** *ten* **Christopher Job** *bass* **The Jonathan Griffith Singers; National Youth Choir of Great Britain; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Jonathan Griffith**

Signum ® ② SIGCD610 (134' • DDD • T)



The title 'Messiah ... Refreshed!' is hype – this purposefully old-fashioned large-scale

performance presents the version for modern symphony orchestra commissioned from Eugene Goossens for Beecham's RCA recording with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus to celebrate Handel's bicentenary. Flutes, piccolo, cor anglais, clarinet, bass clarinet,

contrabassoon, five horns, an extra trumpet, three trombones, tuba, harp and three additional percussionists were incorporated; several movements were cut from Part 3, and the longest arias shorn down to their first sections. Jonathan Griffith's claim that this *Messiah* reupholstered presents the essence of the dramatic aspects of *Messiah* that Handel surely intended is indefensible but it is fascinating to hear the first recording of Goossens's technicoloured treatment since 1959.

The present-day Royal Philharmonic Orchestra play with dignified nobility, although Goossens's hyperactive switches of colours in the Sinfonia gild the lily. 'Comfort ye' has a tincture of horns, winds and washes of harp to accompany John McVeigh's grainy serenity. The tenor blusters around melismatic passages fluently in 'Ev'ry valley' (ever-shifting changes of scoring every few bars are disorientating), whereas 'Thy rebuke hath broken his heart' is quietly emotive. Christopher Job's roaring 'Thus saith the Lord' (with rumbling thunder from a huge bass drum) is irresistibly forthright but Goossens's tinkling triangle and pizzicato for 'the refiner's fire' sounds downright

comical nowadays (as do twanging effects in 'Thou shalt break them'). 'Why do the nations' is thrillingly visceral and has overactive muffled bass drum rolls and punctuating timpani thuds. The truncated trumpet sounds along with lots of other instruments that have, indeed, been changed. Claudia Chapa's earthy timbre lags behind the sedate beat in 'O thou that tellest good tidings'; the melodicism of 'He was despised' comes across better (I dislike Goossens's woodwind-laden injunctions against Handel's simplicity). Penelope Shumate's strong vibrato and exaggerated emphasis of every syllable during 'Rejoice greatly' is in keeping with the retro mood.

The combined National Youth Choir of Great Britain and Griffith's own chorus sing with weighty stateliness. The density of orchestral tricks smudges 'For unto us a child is born', and the enlarged scoring tinkering away in 'Glory to God' leaves no stone unturned. 'His yoke is easy' is hindered by fussy reorchestration, and 'All we like sheep' lacks vitality – although the slow final section has vivid bass trombone. 'Hallelujah' is a big and bold Elgarian *Pomp and Circumstance*. The solemn funeral march scoring for



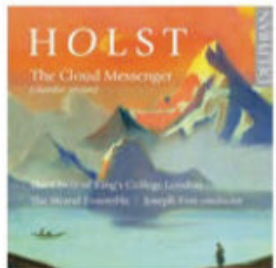
'Behold the Lamb of God' is performed compassionately, and the richly textured 'Surely he hath borne our griefs' is sung with strength and fervour. I enjoyed the brassy splendour of 'The Lord gave the word' and the sheer heft of 'Worthy is the Lamb' (and earth-shattering 'Amen'). The sustained resonances required for Goossens's accretions might be a nostalgic boon reviving a bygone golden age, an intriguing attempt to recapture an incontrovertibly unsubtle chapter in the oratorio's mid-20th-century reception history or a reminder of moribund traditions that sparked revolution from those seeking to restore Handel's intentions. **David Vickers**

## Holst

The Cloud Messenger (arr Fort)<sup>a</sup>.

Five Partsongs, Op 12

The Choir of King's College London / Joseph Fort  
with <sup>a</sup>Caitlin Goreing *contr* <sup>a</sup>The Strand Ensemble  
Delphian © DCD34241 (58' • DDD)



Why, if you're not the composer, would you arrange a large-scale score for much smaller

forces? If it's a question of a reduced performance or no performance, there's a clear, if regrettable, justification – and no one could claim that Holst's *The Cloud Messenger* has ever really gained the place in the repertoire that it deserves. Joseph Fort has created a reduced scoring, with a 15-piece instrumental ensemble in proportion to the 22-strong chamber choir of King's College London, and he has done so with sensitivity, skill and an evident love for Holst's visionary, rapturously romantic score.

But, given the existence of fine full-scale recordings of this work, why record it in a form that Holst did not (so far as I know – the booklet offers no artistic rationale) intend? Where Holst creates washes of sound or numinous vistas, solo strings will always sound strained. The big choral climaxes (and this is a work of Himalayan horizons) suffer most, though the spirit (and the recorded sound) is beyond reproach. But in the more delicate passages – the melancholy Prelude, for example, and the glistening celesta and harp at the peak of Mount Kailasa – the sonorities are exquisite. Fort's spacious, poetic phrasing generates a haunting sense of atmosphere.

The singing, too, has a lovely sweetness and purity of tone. The alto soloist Caitlin Goreing soars as ardently as any on record,

and the freshness and clarity of the choir is ideally suited to the *Five Partsongs*, Op 12: graceful, vivid performances. There's no text for *The Cloud Messenger*, but if you're buying this recording as a fascinating and revealing complement to (say) Hickox's full-scale account (Chandos, 5/91), you'll already have the words. Holst aficionados won't want to be without either.

**Richard Bratby**

## Jommelli

Missa pro defunctis (Requiem), HocJ A1.3.

Libera me, HocJ E.2. Miserere, HocJ C1.23

Il Gardellino / Peter Van Heyghen

Passacaille © PAS1076 (64' • DDD • T/t)



The Requiem in E flat by Niccolò Jommelli (1714–74) became to the late 18th century

what Mozart's was to the 19th. It was composed in 1756 for the exequies of Maria Augusta of Thurn und Taxis, mother of the extravagant opera-loving Carl Eugen, Duke of Württemberg; hastily assembled in the eight days between her death and funeral, Jommelli saved time by repurposing some of his earlier Italian sacred works and by omitting whole chunks of the longer texts. Widely circulated in manuscript and performed around south Germany and Austria, it was conducted by Salieri at a high-profile memorial for Gluck in Vienna in 1787.

It's a fascinating work, perhaps inevitably straddling the twilight of the Baroque period and the dawning of the Classical, its scoring for strings and organ situating its sound world closer to the austere purity of Pergolesi than to the operatic pictorialism of Mozart. It's been recorded before, along with its associated *Libera me*, but the new recording is superior to its bigger-boned Moldavan predecessor in just about every respect. Peter Van Heyghen's eight singers take turns as soloists and sing with true period consciousness, and his tempos are in every case more apposite (ie brisker), coming in fully 12 minutes ahead of Frontalini. The result at last reveals this minor masterpiece in its ideal light. Mozart might have been impressed upon hearing its preponderance of *antico* fugues alternating with Italianate solo writing, by the stark dotted accompaniments for 'Rex tremendae' or by the falling-sevenths figure for 'et semini ejus', which bears more than a passing similarity to 'ne absorbeat' in Mozart's own Requiem.

The coupling is a *Miserere* that again shows Jommelli's ability in the *stile antico*.

If not as immediate in effect as the Requiem, it is performed with comparable care and affection.

**David Threasher**

*Requiem – comparative version:*

Moldava SO, Frontalini (BONG) GB2215-2

## Kreek

'The Suspended Harp of Babel'

**Ambrosini** The Last Dance **Kreek** Bless the Lord, my soul. By the rivers of Babylon. Lord, I cry unto thee. Praise the name of the Lord (Orthodox Vespers). The sun shall not smite thee **Machaut/Kreek** O Jesus, thy pain/Dame, vostre doulz viaire (arr Kreek) **Traditional/Kreek** Awake, my heart. Do the birds worry?. From heaven above to earth I come. He, who lets God prevail. Jacob's Dream/Proemial Psalm (Orthodox Vespers). Whilst great is our poverty **Vox Clamantis / Jaan-Eik Tulve**  
ECM New Series © 481 9041 (69' • DDD)



Whenever I have heard Vox Clamantis in concert it has been

an amazing experience. Their clarity, their precision, their sheer musicianship make them easily one of the best vocal ensembles currently active anywhere in the world. Much of the music on this disc I heard in concert quite recently, in Tallinn, and it is true to say that, with ECM's superb engineering, the frisson of live performance is captured here to perfection.

Cyrillus Kreek (1889–1962) is a composer whose name has filtered through only slowly to the wider public but his music is widely sung and loved in Estonia. His choral style is deeply informed by Estonian folk music, of which he was a collector, and by the Lutheran hymn tradition, while he also set texts from the rites of the Orthodox Church. All these are represented here, with additional material by Marco Ambrosini for the nyckelharpa and the kannel (a kind of zither), freely elaborated from Kreek's material; this creates a welcome variety of texture and colour.

Some of the overlapping can be a little curious: I am not really convinced by the irruption of the opening of *Orthodox Vespers* into the instrumental accompaniment to *Jacob's Dream*, for example, dramatically effective though it undeniably is. Arguably even more surprising, but, I think, more effective, is what Paul Griffiths aptly describes as the 'conversation' between Kreek and Machaut that closes the disc. The melody for Kreek's partial setting of Psalm 103 (104) which follows *Jacob's*





Clarity and precision: the Estonian vocal ensemble Vox Clamantis excel in the folk-inspired music of their compatriot Cyrillus Kreek

*Dream* will, incidentally, be familiar to anyone who knows Rachmaninov's *Vigil*, though it is of course set here in Estonian. Two of the most impressive works are *Bless the Lord, my soul* and *By the rivers of Babylon*, both of which are absolutely ideal vehicles for Vox Clamantis, whose precise placing of chords, assisted by impeccable tuning, means that every harmonic detail is as clear as a bell. Highly recommended.

Ivan Moody

## Lambert · Walton

'Façades'

**Lambert** The Long-Departed Lover<sup>a</sup>. *Trois Pièces nègres pour les touches blanches*<sup>b</sup>.

Three Poems by Li Po<sup>a</sup>. Four Poems by Li Po<sup>a</sup>

**Walton** Beatriz's Song (arr C Palmer)<sup>a</sup>. *Daphne*<sup>a</sup>.

*Façade* Suites (arr Lambert)<sup>b</sup> – No 1; No 2.

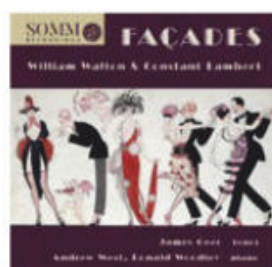
*Siesta*<sup>b</sup>. *Tritons*<sup>a</sup>. *Under the Greenwood Tree*<sup>a</sup>.

*The Winds*<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>James Geer *ten*

<sup>b</sup>Andrew West, <sup>ab</sup>Ronald Woodley *pf*

Somm © SOMMCD0614 (64' • DDD • T)



Walton's association with the Sitwells, who took the young composer under their

familial wings in the 1920s after he left Oxford empty-handed, is well known, particularly because of his collaboration with Edith Sitwell in *Façade*. Sitwell's participation as reciter in *Façade* is also well known, but the role of Constant Lambert in the popularisation of Walton's first significant foray into modernism is less well acknowledged. And yet, had not Walton undertaken the task of writing music for Sitwell's innovative poetry, Lambert might well have taken on the job himself. As time went on, Lambert became established as the reciter for *Façade* and he continued to take a special interest in the future of Walton's work.

Indeed, *Façade* more or less became a symbol of the close friendship between the two men and Walton frequently admitted that he sorely missed his 'old pal' after Lambert's death in 1951. Lambert played a major part in the now familiar orchestral suites (consisting of 11 movements), especially the second, which only came together in 1938. What is more, not only did Lambert contribute to the decision of which movements to include, but he also orchestrated four of the six movements which became the Second Suite, and it was Lambert moreover who, as an accomplished pianist himself, made the

piano duet arrangements which appear on this recording, crisply and sympathetically rendered by Andrew West and Ronald Woodley. Beautifully conceived for four hands in terms of texture and idiomatic fluency, these transcriptions have much in common with the resourceful 'white-note' studies of Lambert's *Trois Pièces nègres pour les touches blanches* composed in 1949, miniatures designed only to be played on the white keys of the piano. These are also performed with an empathy and stylistic awareness (especially the final 'cake-walk' movement).

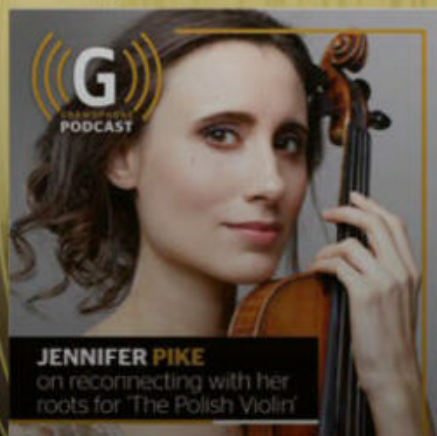
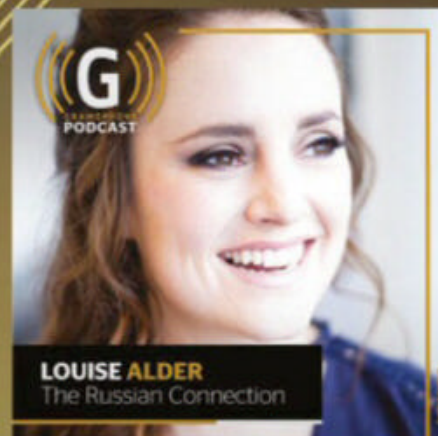
The rest of the album is devoted to a variety of vocal music produced by the two composers, much of it connected with the neoclassical world of *Façade* so colourfully imbued with jazz, dance rhythms, national dance types and popular song. Although Lambert's output was more unequal than Walton's, he was, at his best, a composer of prodigious ability, which Diaghalev recognised in the 1920s with the ballet *Romeo and Juliet* and which shone even more brightly in *The Rio Grande* after its astonishing premiere in 1927, the epoch's most dazzling hybrid creation. The post-Satie world of Lambert's Li Po songs, written between 1927 and 1930, is compellingly





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chaste and charmingly enigmatic in James Geer's hands.

The selection of Walton's songs, a much neglected part of his output, is representative of a somewhat broader stylistic base than Lambert's more acerbic, more Stravinskian propensity. The 1918 setting of Swinburne's 'The Winds' reminds us of Walton's extraordinary teenage talent (one spotted by an ever-vigilant Parry), but the lovely setting of Sitwell's 'Daphne' of 1926, wistful and delicate, provides further glimpses of Walton's *Façade*-like mentality, one that was still evolving after the first appearance of the work in 1922. 'Under the Greenwood Tree' (for the film production of *As You Like It* in 1936) and 'Beatriz's Song' (for Louis MacNeice's radio play *Christopher Columbus* in 1942) are also delightful examples of Walton's affinity for Tudor pastiche. **Jeremy Dibble**

## Parry · Gray · Stanford · C Wood

**Gray** *Magnificat* and *Nunc dimittis* in F minor  
**Parry** *Songs of Farewell* **Stanford** *Magnificat*, Op 164. Three Motets, Op 38 **C Wood** *Nunc dimittis* in B flat

**The Choir of Westminster Abbey /**

**James O'Donnell**

Hyperion Ⓢ CDA68301 (65' • DDD • T/t)



The four composers were all born within the two decades from 1848 and, to varying degrees, had an eye and ear on the bigger musical picture (Bach, polyphonic and antiphonic traditions) in writing choral music rooted in its time and place yet resonating far beyond those coordinates. It's a nourishing, consistent programme of music for voices alone, for which the choir of Westminster Abbey travelled to the vaulting acoustic of All Hallows, Gospel Oak.

The ensemble rides that acoustic knowingly, using its echo and harbouring its resonance, but the anatomy of its sound is as distinctive as it is lopsided: trebles capable of pinpoint accuracy, extraordinary blend (for children) and soaring confidence but low adult voices heavy with a vibrato that can obscure pitch and middle voices in danger of disappearing in between the two. Otherwise, for maturity, accuracy and a confident wall of sound, Westminster Abbey's choir has perhaps never more resembled David Hill's Winchester Cathedral Choir of the 1990s – a high-water mark.

The masterpieces come at the beginning and the end, the motets by Stanford and the songs by Parry, in which whole worlds of pain, belief, hope and tradition are condensed into telling cadences that internalise rather than boast about technique and aspiration (in contrast to Stanford's Bach-study B flat *Magnificat*, which undeniably does, and Gray's F minor Service, which gets too close). It's in these more classical designs that O'Donnell's choir shows its poise: thrillingly bright and straight-backed in Stanford's 'Caelos ascendit hodie' (and judicious in that vibrant final cadence) and going with the flow in the tremendous text-led freedoms of Parry's *Songs of Farewell*, the most remarkable meeting of English choral style with sheer instinct. In that work, this is tonally and textually a soft-edged performance in comparison with Robert Quinney's from New College, Oxford, and Nigel Short's crystalline and agile Tenebrae recording (currently a first-choice recommendation). But it radiates an optimism of its own, which may well prove even more special in the long run.

**Andrew Mellor**

*Parry – selected comparisons:*

*Tenebrae*, Short (12/11) (SIGN) SIGCD267

*Ch of New Coll, Oxford*, Quinney

(12/18) (NOVU) NCR1394

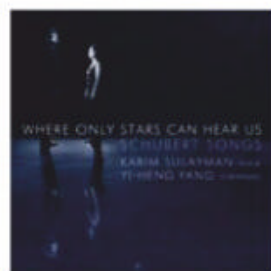
## Schubert

'Where Only Stars Can Hear Us'

*Abendbilder*, D650. *Abends unter der Linde*, D235. *Alinde*, D904. *Am Meer*, D957 No 12. *An den Mond*, D193. *An den Mond*, D259. *An die Laute*, D905. *Des Fischers Liebesglück*, D933. *Erlkönig*, D328. *Die Forelle*, D550. *Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren*, D360. *Nacht und Träume*, D827. *Nachtgesang*, D119. *Das Rosenband*, D280. *Die Sterne*, D939. *Die Sternennacht*, D670. *Der Vater mit dem Kind*, D906. *Der Winterabend*, D938

**Karim Sulayman** *ten* **Yi-Heng Yang** *fp*

Avie Ⓢ AV2400 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Here from Avie comes another *Lieder* disc, following up on Kyle Stegall and Eric Zivian's Schumann recital (10/19), where the instrument chosen by the pianist risks stealing the limelight. In this case it's an 1830 fortepiano by Joseph Simon, which, Karim Sulayman's own engaging booklet note tells us, he and pianist Yi-Heng Yang christened 'Simon' during the recording sessions.

And 'Simon' certainly has a beguilingly gentle and human sound – beautifully

captured by the engineers. Yang, moreover, is superbly adept at bringing out the many veiled shades it can produce; the introduction to 'An den Mond', using moderator pedal, is wonderfully seductive. The two performers have also put together a superb programme, one that explores themes of being lost, alone and seeking solace and guidance in nature – but with a loose enough brief to incorporate a bit of fishing ('Die Forelle') and an excursion to the dark forests of the Romantic imagination ('Erlkönig').

Sulayman is always engaging, with an appealing honesty to his approach and a vividness to his storytelling (his 'Erlkönig' is powerfully effective). His light, silvery tenor is in many ways suited to much of the programme's theme, but the flipside is a paleness and shortness of sap and sweetness; nor does the tenor's German always feel entirely natural.

Adjust to the tone, though, and there's still a great deal to enjoy in these performances, with highlights including a bright, sparkling 'Forelle', a delightful 'Alinde' and an enchanting 'Nacht und Träume'. There are fine accounts of the substantial 'Des Fischers Liebesglück' and 'Der Winterabend', too, with the latter especially haunting. **Hugo Shirley**

## Tchaikovsky

*All-Night Vigil*, Op 52. *The Angel Cried Out*.

*Hymn in Honour of Saints Cyril and Methodius*.

*Jurists' Song*. *A Legend*, Op 54 No 5

**Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kljava**

Online Ⓢ ODE1352-2 (54' • DDD • T/t)



Tchaikovsky's settings for the Orthodox Vigil service (which comprises Vespers followed by Matins and the First Hour in the Byzantine rite) are much less well known than his *Liturgy*, written in 1878. This is in part because the *Liturgy* caused a great scandal, being the first liturgical setting to be published without the authorisation of the ecclesiastical censor, and considered by many to be too inappropriately showy for use in services. Tchaikovsky himself, though his relationship with his Orthodox faith was ambiguous, took the task of writing sacred music very seriously indeed, and the *Vigil* service, written in 1881-82, came about as an attempt to conform more to the spirit of the traditions of monophonic chant then beginning to be investigated in Russia.

It is intentionally not dramatic in the way the *Liturgy* is, following as it does the



contours and modality of various kinds of Russian chant (the attentive listener will notice correspondences with Rachmaninov's *Vigil* in this respect), but the work nevertheless contains some striking moments. Tchaikovsky's setting of 'Svete tikhi' ('Gladdening Light') is from this point of view one of the highlights of the set, and the Latvian Radio Choir are alive to its every nuance, balancing a marvellous delicacy of sound against luminously energetic counterpoint. 'Blagosloven yesi Gospodi' similarly brings out the best from these singers, with its rapid oscillations between one dynamic and another, one speed and another – indeed, in this kind of writing one recognises clearly the skill of Tchaikovsky the orchestrator. The text- and chant-driven Great Doxology is something I would love to hear with much greater frequency in liturgical use; perhaps this recording will encourage choirs to take it up (though the composer does not spare the sopranos!).

Rounding off this recording is a miscellany of other choral pieces, of which the lovely *A Legend* (1883) is very likely to be familiar to Anglophone audiences, having found fame in an English-language adaptation as 'The Crown of Roses', though the dramatic setting of the paschal Zadostoynik *Angel vopiyashe* (1887) is chosen to end the disc in appropriately celebratory fashion. If I have a complaint about this disc, it is that it is somewhat short, but the quality of both singing and recording is superb. **Ivan Moody**

## Thwaites

'From Five Continents'

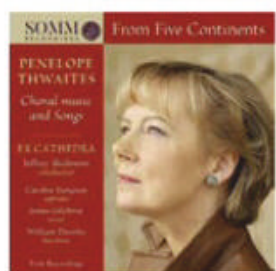
Lead, kindly light. Christmas Songs. India – Australia – Africa. Love Songs. Missa brevis. Psalm 19, 'The heavens tell out the glory of God'. Psalm 23, 'The Lord is my shepherd'. Psalm 24, 'The earth is the Lord's'. Psalm 121, 'I will lift up mine eyes'. St Teresa's Bookmark. Five Shakespeare Songs

**Carolyn Sampson** *sop* **James Gilchrist** *ten*

**William Dazeley** *bar* **Penelope Thwaites** *pf*

**Ex Cathedra / Jeffrey Skidmore**

Somm Ⓢ SOMMCD0612 (72' • DDD • T)



If the name Penelope Thwaites is familiar it's probably as a pianist. Australian-

born, London-based Thwaites has recorded extensively and is best known for her major contribution to Chandos's 19-disc Grainger Edition. But it's as a composer that she appears here in a recital that pairs her choral works and solo songs,

all presented by an enticing roster of performers.

Anyone who has heard Thwaites's John Wesley-inspired 1976 musical *Ride! Ride!* will know the composer's skill at pastiche. But what was a strength in the context of the many magpie numbers of a stage show here prevents us getting much of a sense of a coherent voice.

The songs, performed variously and excellently by Carolyn Sampson, James Gilchrist and William Dazeley, share the world of Quilter or Butterworth – rueful, nostalgic, intensely English. Thwaites is good at drawing-room sentimentality and wryness, and both 'Forestry' and 'Reverie' as well as a set of *Shakespeare Songs* for chorus and soloists see her at her best. A wonderfully earthy, almost Falstaffian 'Fear no more the heat o' the sun' from Dazeley banishes memories of Finzi in its contrasting spirit, while 'O mistress mine' and 'It was a lover' have the lean-back lightness of revue numbers.

The biggest piece included is the concise *Missa brevis*, which nods to Rubbra in its brooding, modal character, but which – as with all the sacred choral music here – ultimately defaults to a rather conventional, early 19th-century style. The triptych of travel-inspired choral songs *India – Australia – Africa* with their self-conscious exoticisms teeters dangerously close to *African Sanctus* territory, and despite strong performances from Ex Cathedra and the soloists this doesn't quite add up to a coherent listen. **Alexandra Coghlan**

## I Venables

'Love Lives Beyond the Tomb'

Aurelia, Op 37 No 3<sup>a</sup>. Chamber Music III, Op 41 No 6<sup>a</sup>. I caught the changes of the year, Op 45 No 1<sup>a</sup>. It Rains, Op 33 No 2<sup>a</sup>. Love lives beyond the tomb, Op 37 No 1<sup>a</sup>. Remember This, Op 40<sup>b</sup>.

Through These Pale Cold Days, Op 46<sup>c</sup>. The Way Through, Op 33 No 1<sup>a</sup>

<sup>ab</sup>**Mary Bevan** *sop* <sup>bc</sup>**Allan Clayton** *ten*

**Graham J Lloyd** *pf* <sup>c</sup>**Eoin Schmidt-Martin** *va*

<sup>b</sup>**Carducci Quartet**

Signum Ⓢ SIGCD617 (79' • DDD • T)



I'm ashamed to report that this is my first encounter with the music of Ian Venables

and it immediately set me off to search out more. He is a very fine composer of songs, with a real feel for poetry, and can spin sympathetic vocal lines for his singers. This new Signum disc (there are two others) is evenly shared between two singers, the soprano Mary Bevan and the tenor Allan

Clayton. Each has a set of songs or a cycle plus a joint work, *Remember This*, a setting of Andrew Motion's poem written in memory of the Queen Mother.

The six songs sung by Bevan represent something of a departure for Venables. Most of his works are for male voice (Andrew Kennedy and Roderick Williams feature on those other Signum discs), yet his writing for soprano is wonderfully accomplished, texts set as to remain intelligible and also allowing Bevan to float creamy top notes. 'Love lives beyond the tomb' is the highlight of this set, a wonderfully nostalgic piece composed for Lady Bliss in celebration of her 100th birthday and reflecting on her love for her husband, the composer Arthur Bliss. Venables's setting of James Joyce's 'Chamber Music III' is also notable, chiming midnight bells evoking the nocturnal scene.

Clayton sings *Through These Pale Cold Days*, a cycle setting war poets from Wilfred Owen to Siegfried Sassoon. Here Venables adds a viola, which adds a certain plangency to the title-song, Isaac Rosenberg's remarkable poem about his persecution within the ranks for being a Jew. *Col legno* strikes add further bitterness to Sassoon's devastating poem 'Suicide in the trenches', where Clayton reaches heroic heights. The closing 'If you forget', a setting of Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy, is beautifully haunting, tenor soaring softly above simple piano chords. Graham J Lloyd's playing is eloquently tender and he and the composer contribute very detailed booklet notes (some 12 pages!) giving the compositional background and much musical analysis.

*Remember This* is the most striking work on the disc, a 30-minute setting of Motion's poem that is itself split into an aria-and-recitative structure which allows Venables to treat it as something of a cantata. It features a framing narrative recounting the Queen Mother's death and lying-in-state through to her funeral, interleaved with reflections on some of the things special to her, including salmon spawning, trees and her love of horse racing. Venables writes for piano and string quartet here (the excellent Carducci Quartet), allowing for a thickening of textures. Apart from the horse racing episode, though, the songs are predominantly slow in pace, as they are on the rest of the disc, which means that listening to the whole 78 minutes in one go isn't especially recommended. Much better to programme your listening to give each of the three sections your separate attention. **Mark Pullinger**





A close friendship: the tenor James Geer and pianist Ronald Woodley perform interconnected works by Constant Lambert and William Walton – see review on page 67

## Zelenka

'Missa 1724'

Kyrie, Sanctus & Agnus Dei, ZWV26. Gloria, ZWV30. Credo, ZWV32. Salve regina, ZWV137

**Lucia Caihuela, Jeanne Mendoche, Aldona Bartnik** *sops* **Kamila Mazalová, Aneta Petrasová** *contrs* **Václav Čížek, Benjamin Glaubitz** *tens* **Tomáš Šelc** *bass* **Collegium Vocale 1704; Collegium 1704 / Václav Luks**

Accent © ACC24363 (54' • DDD • T/t)



This imaginary Mass is constructed from motley liturgical pieces

created for various unknown occasions during the first half of the 1720s. Václav Luks's helpful note explains that some of the material crops up in different forms in Zelenka's other works. 'Christe eleison' is paraphrased from a *Miserere* (1722), and the second 'Kyrie' (repeated for 'Dona nobis pacem') is a chromatic double fugue later adjusted in a Requiem for Augustus the Strong (1733). The fabulous music-making does these variants and rarities ample justice. Collegium Vocale 1704's arching phrases ebb and flow, with eloquent leaning upon Zelenka's rich

harmonic suspensions and a cultivated blend between all strands of textures. The excellent orchestra pay keen attention to sonorities and rhetorical vitality.

Dated 1724, the *Gloria* is extensively reworked from Zelenka's own early *Missa Judica me* (1714), also with prominence given to the new addition of trombones. The springy opening, replete with oboes and vigorous gestures, has impressively balanced interplay between soloists, full choir and the orchestra's energy and élan. Sudden switches between sentimental slow moments and lively Italianate quick-fire passagework in the aria 'Laudamus te' require gentle fluidity and declamatory fervour from the tenor Václav Čížek. The duet 'Qui tollis' is sung delicately by the soprano Jeanne Mendoche and alto Aneta Petrasová, accompanied tastefully by two lutes, chamber organ, and three trombones that play with dexterity and gravitas. There is more than a whiff of Lotti in a short yet harmonically astounding 'Qui sedes', and the convivial 'Quoniam' is sung suavely by the bass Tomáš Šelc.

A concise eight-voice double-choir *Credo* (c1724) is packed densely with inventive counterpoint and colours, especially its quirky concluding 'Amen'. It is tricky to predict where Zelenka is aiming to take us

during a strange 'Osanna' fugue that ends the *Sanctus* – but a fascinating contrast of function and temperament is provided by the straightforwardness of a compact *Benedictus* interpolated into Zelenka's copy of a Mass by Giovanni Pisani (perhaps in the early 1730s). The afterpiece *Salve regina* is preserved only in a copy made by Bach's Leipzig successor Gottlob Harrer, and it is a parody of a canzon from Frescobaldi's *Fiori musicali* (1635); the knowingly archaic idiom ensures that Luks's selection of rarities covers multiple facets of Zelenka's complex musical personality.

David Vickers

## 'Arion'

'Voyage of a Slavic Soul'

**Dvořák** Eight Love Songs, Op 83 B160 **Janáček** *láska* (Love). *Muzikanti* (Musicians). *Rozmarýn* (Rosemary). *Stálost* (Constancy) **Novák** A Tale of the Heart, Op 8 **Rachmaninov** Six Songs, Op 4 – No 4, Sing not to me, beautiful maiden; No 5, O thou, my field. *Arion*, Op 34 No 5. How fair this spot, Op 21 No 7. Spring waters, Op 14 No 11 **Rimsky-Korsakov** Softly the soul flew up to heaven, Op 27 No 1. Two Songs, Op 56 **Tchaikovsky** Does the day reign, Op 47 No 6. The mild stars shone for us, Op 60 No 12. Why?, Op 6 No 5



**Natalya Romaniw** *sop* **Lada Valešová** *pf*  
Orchid © ORC100131 (73' • DDD • T/t)



There are few things more satisfying for a critic than watching a promising young singer blossom into a major artist. It was back in 2011 that I first spotted Natalya Romaniw, bowled over by her outstanding Iolanta in a double bill – with Donizetti's *Rita!* – at the Guildhall School of Music & Drama. She already possessed a substantial sound and seemed the perfect fit for the big Slavic repertoire, borne out by magnificent performances in recent years as Tatyana, Jenůfa, Rusalka and Lisa (*Pique Dame*) for British companies and summer festivals, including Opera Holland Park, where she returned last summer for another Iolanta. She's also become a fixture in Italian *spinto* repertoire at the Coliseum, where she made an impressive role debut as Cio-Cio-San earlier this year.

Romaniw is Welsh but has Ukrainian roots, her grandfather settling in Wales during the Second World War. She grew up learning Ukrainian folk songs, so the Slavic repertoire seems to come naturally to her. On this debut recital disc, she explores Russian and Czech songs of six composers from the familiar – Rachmaninov's 'Sing not to me, beautiful maiden' – to the rarely heard Vítězslav Novák.

Make no mistake, Romaniw is a great talent. The plush richness of her soprano is astonishing. Anna Netrebko, in a rare foray into song rep, performed a handful of the same Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky songs in her 2009 Salzburg Festival programme with Daniel Barenboim (DG, 6/10), and it's no exaggeration to say that Romaniw need not fear any comparison. Indeed, her lower register is at times even richer (bear in mind the Russian's soprano has grown considerably since that Salzburg recital).

Romaniw taps into the melancholy of the Russian songs especially well. She opens strongly with a trio of Rimsky songs, including the beautiful 'Nimfa', while her Tchaikovsky selection is equally fine. There are occasional moments in the Rachmaninov songs where her soprano sounds pressured, and she doesn't quite get the 'float' in the middle of 'How fair this spot', but 'Arion', which lends the disc its title, demonstrates terrific depth of tone.

In Dvořák's Op 83 *Love Songs*, Romaniw doesn't always take the same intimate approach that Magdalena Kožená achieves on her (early) DG album (8/00), but it's great to hear these sung so passionately. And what a gem the final song is, 'Ó, duše drahá, jedinká', with its romantic, swooning line 'were I a singing swan, I'd fly to you'. The selection from Janáček's *Moravian Folk Poetry in Songs* positively burst with character – aided by the Czech pianist Lada Valešová as ever-attentive partner – while the five Novák songs that close the disc are a revelation, so beautifully crafted. The recording, in Suffolk's Potton Hall, is wonderfully natural, allowing a fine bloom. Strongly recommended. Remember the name; you'll not forget the voice. **Mark Pullinger**

## 'Nuits'

**Berlioz** Les nuits d'été – L'île inconnue<sup>a</sup>

**Chausson** Chanson perpétuelle<sup>a</sup> **La Tombelle**

**Orientale Fauré** Après un rêve<sup>a</sup>. La bonne

chanson – La lune blanche luit dans les bois<sup>a</sup>

**Hahn** Une revue – La dernière valse<sup>a</sup> **Lekeu** Trois

poèmes – Nocturne<sup>a</sup> **Liszt** La lugubre gondole II

**Louiguy** La vie en rose<sup>a</sup> **Massenet** Nuit

d'Espagne<sup>a</sup> **Messager** L'amour masqué – J'ai

deux amants<sup>a</sup> **Ropartz** Quatre Poèmes – Ceux

qui, parmi les morts d'amour<sup>a</sup> **Saint-Saëns** Désir

de l'orient<sup>a</sup> **Widor** Piano Quintet No 1, Op 7 –

Molto vivace

<sup>a</sup>**Véronique Gens** *sop* **I Giardini**

Alpha © ALPHA589 (62' • DDD • T/t)



A co-production between Alpha and Palazzetto Bru Zane, Véronique

Gens's 'Nuits' is basically a recital of mélodies for soprano and piano quintet, much of which consists of arrangements by Alexandre Dratwicki for the same forces as Chausson's experimental *Chanson perpétuelle* – the only work here specifically written for this particular combination of performers, though Guillaume Lekeu also adopted it for the revised version of his ravishing 'Nocturne', originally with piano. The aim, Dratwicki tells us in his booklet note, is to 'expand the repertoire for voice, strings and piano' by 'harking back to the art of transcription so dear to the 19th century', and to offer 'an original reading of well known pieces, and bring to light some forgotten gems'. Whether the disc ideally succeeds, however, is debatable.

The programme, focusing on the idea of 'nocturnal abandon', is fancifully

divided into four sections, dealing with twilight, exotic or orientalist fantasy, reveries and nightmares, and love affairs, clandestine or otherwise, all of which certainly affords us insight into its composers' preoccupations, though too few of Dratwicki's arrangements shed fresh light on either the music itself or the milieu in which it was written. Some of them can be affective in their own right. Saint-Saëns's 'Désir de l'orient' began life as a tenor aria in *La princesse jaune*, and Dratwicki cleverly adds the japonaiserie *allegro* from the opera's overture as a postlude. 'La dernière valse' from Hahn's 1925 *Une revue* is all elegant cabaret nostalgia, while Ropartz's 'Ceux qui, parmi les morts d'amour' has a morbid, bittersweet beauty. Elsewhere, however, Dratwicki's interventions can be obtrusive. Pizzicato strings add nothing to the brittle, percussive piano accompaniment of Massenet's 'Nuit d'Espagne' and Berlioz's 'L'île inconnue' loses much of its magic when reworked for chamber ensemble.

As one might expect, however, everything is beautifully and fastidiously done. Gens is in fine voice here, caressing phrases and words with all her customary refinement. *Chanson perpétuelle*, reflective yet intense, then suddenly searing at its climax, gets one of its finest performances on disc, while the Lekeu is a model of sensual understatement, superbly sustained. Piaf's 'La vie en rose' sounds altogether too polite, though 'J'ai deux amants' from Messager's *L'amour masqué* is delicious in its knowing, erotic wit. I Giardini are excellent, too, really coming into their own in the instrumental pieces that punctuate the disc. La Tombelle's *Orientale*, originally for piano four hands, is gracefully sensuous, while their cellist Pauline Buet and pianist David Violi give a stark, uncompromising account of Liszt's own transcription of his second version of 'La lugubre gondole'. It will probably leave you in two minds but is worth hearing for Gens singing Chausson and Lekeu above all. **Tim Ashley**

## 'Paradise Lost'

**Anonymous** I will give my love an apple

**Bernstein** Silhouette (Galilee) **Brahms**

Salamander, Op 107 No 2 **Britten** Songs and

Proverbs of William Blake – A Poison Tree

**Crumb** Wind Elegy **Daniel-Lesur** Ce qu'Adam

dit à Ève **Debussy** Apparition **Eisler** Fünf

Elegien – No 23, Jeden Morgen mein Brot zu

verdienen; No 24, Diese Stadt hat mich belehrt

**Fauré** Paradis, Op 95 No 1 **Ives** Evening **Mahler**

Das irdische Leben **Messiaen** Harawi –

Bonjour toi, colombe verte **Pfitzner** Röschen

biss den Apfel an, Op 33 No 6 **Purcell** Sleep,





In fine voice: Véronique Gens joins forces with the chamber group I Giardini in a nocturnal programme that mixes sensuality with searing intensity

Adam sleep, Z195 **Rachmaninov** A-oo!, Op 38  
No 6 **Ravel** L'enfant et les sortilèges - Air du  
feu. Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis **Reimann**  
Gib mir den Apfel **Schubert** Abendstern,  
D806. Auflösung, D807 **Schumann** Das  
Paradies und die Peri, Op 50 - Jetzt sank des  
Abends goldner Schein. Warte, warte wilder  
Schiffmann, Op 24 No 6 **Stravinsky** Pastorale  
**Wolf** Goethe Lieder - No 26, Die Spröde; No 27,  
Die Bekehrte

**Anna Prohaska** *sop* **Julius Drake** *pf*  
Alpha © ALPHA581 (64' • DDD • T/t)



As one might expect from its Miltonic title, Anna Prohaska and Julius Drake's 'Paradise Lost' takes the Biblical narrative of the fall of man and the expulsion from Eden as its starting point, though this is not so much a disc of sacred music as a complex examination of our sense of existential alienation from the ideal of the perfect earthly life that Paradise represents. Ambitiously programmed, it aims high (arguably too high), touching on the relationship between innocence and experience, our fantasies of union with unsullied nature, and the suffering and injustice resulting from our desecration of the world in which we live.

The mood, bittersweet at best, darkens as it progresses. The opening song, Ravel's 'Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis', reminds us that the very idea of Paradise contains that which must undermine it, as natural beauty offsets thoughts of an absent soldier lover. The erotic idyll of Daniel-Lesur's 'Ce qu'Adam dit à Ève' is eventually fractured by birdsong, summoning the lovers into the potentially dangerous world beyond, and a group of bitter, aphoristic songs, flanking Britten's 'A Poison Tree' at the midpoint, eventually shatters the atmosphere, ushering in Lieder about exile, banishment and lovelessness. The emotional climax comes with the urban horror of Eisler's 'Hollywood-Elegien' ('Paradise and hell can be one city') and Mahler's contemplation of poverty and hunger in 'Das irdische Leben', before the disc closes ambiguously with Crumb's 'Wind Elegy', in which nature itself mourns for errant humanity.

It also allows Prohaska and Drake to explore an uncommonly wide stylistic range, from Purcell to Reimann at his most pointillistic, embracing the bravura coloratura of the Fire's aria from Ravel's *L'enfant et les sortilèges* and the agitprop anger of Brecht and Eisler at their most trenchant. Sometimes a flutter creeps into Prohaska's tone, and consonants can slip,

particularly when singing in French: Debussy's 'Apparition', for instance, sounds really rapturous and ecstatic, though we hear fractionally too few of the words. Elsewhere, though, there are marvellous things. Schubert's 'Auflösung', taken faster than usual, achieves real exaltation. Line and dynamic control are everything in an aria from *Das Paradies und die Peri*, which is as exquisite as it is sorrowful. And the fraught dialogue of 'Das irdische Leben' is devastatingly done, with the child's misery sharply contrasted with the mother's increasing desperation.

Prohaska's Eisler is excellent, and we could perhaps do with a whole disc of it. The extracts from *La chanson d'Ève* and Messiaen's *Harawi*, however, lose some of their impact away from their respective cycles: the Messiaen, in particular, draws a virtuoso display of tone colour from Drake that leaves you hankering after the complete work. He, characteristically, is exemplary throughout, beautifully expressive and always alert to the subtle shifts of meaning of each song. It's a challenging recital that in some ways surveys a greater subject than can adequately be contained on a single disc. But the best of it is very fine and infinitely rewarding.

**Tim Ashley**



# WHAT NEXT?

Do you have a favourite piece of music and want to explore further? Our monthly feature suggests some musical journeys that venture beyond the most familiar works, with some recommended versions. This month, **Andrew Mellor's** point of departure is ...

## Grieg's *Peer Gynt*, Op 23 (1875)

**G**rieg was taken with the magic, sensitivity and insight of Henrik Ibsen's verse play *Peer Gynt* – a Norwegian *Forrest Gump* telling of a young man's fantastical globetrotting and seasoned with societal critiques. Grieg wrote 26 numbers for the stage version first seen in February 1876. Each production that followed used variations on that first musical menu, but Grieg deemed any major shortcut (including his own suites) a pale reflection of his original intent. Nothing reveals the versatility, nuance and endless freshness of Grieg's musical storytelling like a comprehensive odyssey through his music, more easily realised since Finn Benestad compiled his critical edition, a re-creation of the original version, in 1988. Paavo Järvi's recording from Estonia scores highly for both freshness and completeness.

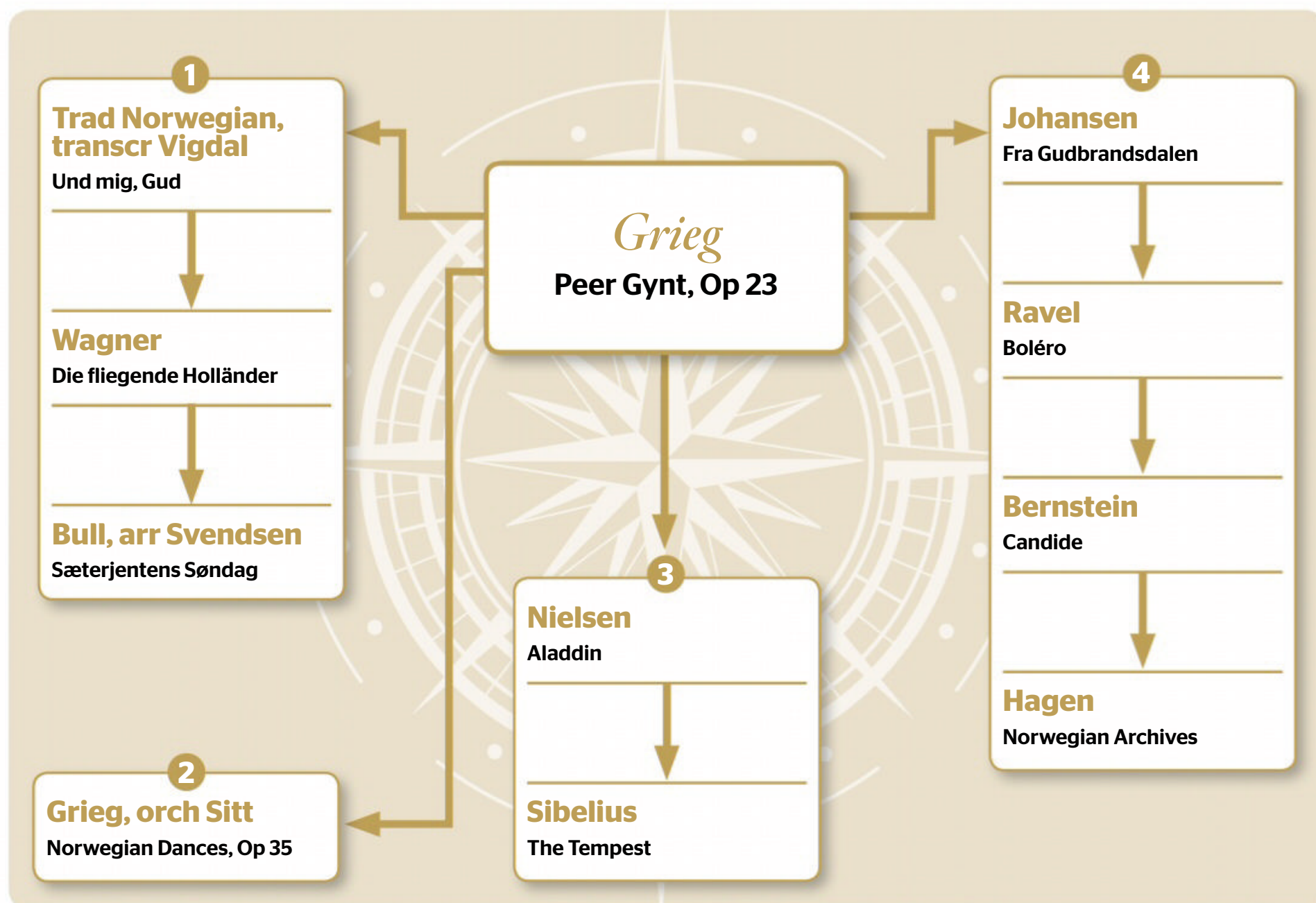
● Peter Mattei *bar* Camilla Tilling *sop* Charlotte Hellekant *mez* Ellerhein Girls' Ch; Estonian National Male Ch & SO / Paavo Järvi (Erato, 8/05)

### 1 Contexts

**Trad Norwegian, transcr Vigdal** **Und mig, Gud** From the *slåtter* (Norwegian dances) to the Piano Concerto, Grieg's music is rooted in Norway's folk music tradition, which includes congregational church music. On this remarkable recording, each member of the Oslo Chamber Choir learnt the hymn 'Forgive me, God' aurally from the folk singer Unni Løvlid. The song was passed down via Ragnar Vigdal (1913-91), who encouraged the brooding, semi-ornamented approach heard here. The roots of both tune and text go back centuries.

● Oslo Chamber Choir / Håkon Daniel Nystedt (2L, 11/19)

**Wagner** **Die fliegende Holländer** (1841) Grieg studied in Wagner's home town, Leipzig, and Wagner responded strongly to the topology and folklore of Scandinavia in works from





*Die fliegende Holländer* to *Der Ring des Nibelungen*. To colour Peer's long journey home, Grieg depicted a storm-tossed sea, which appears to salute the former opera. Few recordings conjure up the terror of a turbulent Baltic Sea quite like Janowski's does.

● Sols; Berlin Rad Ch & SO / Marek Janowski (Pentatone, A/11)

**Bull, arr Svendsen Sæterjentens Søndag** (1848) Ole Bull led Grieg to consider how he might use the songs, dance rhythms and fiddle tunes of Norway in the creation of music that would take continental Romanticism in a locally distinctive but internationally relevant direction (Bull's prancing André Rieu-like ego was also critiqued in Ibsen's play). When he wasn't sounding kitsch, Bull laid some vital groundwork for Grieg, as in 'The Herd Girl's Sunday' (from *Et saeterbesøg* – 'A Visit to the Mountain Pasture'), here in Johan Svendsen's arrangement.

● Charlie Siem *vn* Munich RO / Paul Goodwin (Sony, 12/14)

## 2 Appendix

**Grieg, orch Sitt Norwegian Dances, Op 35** (1880) For an 1886 revival of *Peer Gynt* in Copenhagen, Grieg withdrew four movements, added an orchestration of one of his Op 17 piano pieces ('Bridal Procession') and sanctioned the insertion of three of his four *Norwegian Dances*, Op 35, into the play's second act. The dances use material from Ludvig Lindeman's collection of authentic Norwegian folk tunes, and were orchestrated from Grieg's four-hand piano originals by Hans Sitt.

● WDR Symphony Orchestra / Eivind Aadland (Audite, 2/20)

## 3 Counterparts

**Nielsen Aladdin** (1919) In 1919, the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen commissioned incidental music from its former violinist Nielsen to accompany a staging of Adam Oehlenschläger's *Aladdin*. Nielsen wrote around 80 minutes of music, much of which was cut and rearranged (much to the composer's anger). He protected his original thoughts, which might not be quintessentially progressive Nielsen but are charming, intermittently revealing and echo Grieg's own musical imagining of the exotic East.

● Sols; Danish Nat Chamber Ch & SO / Gennady Rozhdestvensky (Chandos, 5/93)

**Sibelius The Tempest** (1925) Illusion, disillusion and unpredictability collide on Shakespeare's magical island, and Sibelius's response to those ideas is one of the most elusive and remarkable sets of dramatic incidental music ever created (while also adumbrating a possible harmonic pathway for the composer's Eighth Symphony). Again, it was written for Copenhagen's Royal Theatre. Like Grieg's work, it presents quite some journey in its complete form.

● Sols; Opera Festival Chor; Finnish RSO / Jukka-Pekka Saraste (Ondine, 8/14)

## 4 Descendants

**Johansen Fra Gudbrandsdalen** (1922) David Monrad Johansen (1888-1974) was a close personal and musical acolyte of Grieg, and the composer who ensured a degree of tradition and continuity during Norway's creatively hyperactive inter-war years. Ibsen mined the tales that became *Peer Gynt* from the Gudbrandsdal region north-west of Lillehammer, the precise geographical inspiration for Johansen's piano suite 'From Gudbrandsdalen'.

● Rune Alver *pf* (LAWO)



Sibelius offers 'quite some journey' in his *Tempest*, as illustrated by Arthur Rackham

**Ravel Boléro** (1928) Ravel once said that he hadn't written a single note that wasn't influenced by Grieg. There are undeniable parallels linking the two composers' most famous creations: respectively, 'In the Hall of the Mountain King' (from *Peer Gynt*) and *Boléro*. Yes, the principal of Grieg's piece is a gradual *accelerando* while that of *Boléro* is the maintaining of a single tempo, but both works use a combination of rhythm and extreme focus to hold an audience's expectations in the air.

● London Symphony Orchestra / Claudio Abbado (DG, 12/86)

**Bernstein Candide** (1956) Voltaire's *Candide* is a coming-of-age story with several premonitions of *Peer Gynt*, not least its layers of satire and its fantastical narrative in which a sheltered young man heads out into the big wide world to experience extraordinary revelations and hardships, returning home a little wiser. Originally, Bernstein's operetta was to have been a rather simpler series of incidental pieces, until he persuaded his librettist Lillian Hellman otherwise.

● Sols; London Symphony Chor & Orch / Leonard Bernstein (DG, 8/91)

**Hagen Norwegian Archives** (2005) Lars Petter Hagen (*b*1975) grapples with his country's musical and traditional legacies with beautiful results that somehow provoke those who feel the need to be provoked while prompting deep reflection on the very idea of beauty in the rest of us. If *Peer Gynt* is a loving satire on introspective Norway, so is Hagen's *Norwegian Archives*. The album housing it was described in *Gramophone* as 'the most important new music disc to arrive for a long time'.

● Oslo Philharmonic / Rolf Gupta (Aurora, 1/14)

Available to stream at Apple Music



# Opera



**Richard Bratby welcomes a full evening of Savoy entertainment:**

*'The vivacity and catchiness of the music is utterly delightful and the scoring is surely finer than it ever needed to be'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 78**



**Hugo Shirley on Jonas Kaufmann's studio take on Verdi's Otello:**

*'Kaufmann bares his dramatic teeth impressively and to powerful effect; he is notably moving in the final scene'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 80**

## Gassmann

'Opera Arias'

**Achille in Sciro** - Ah, ingrato, amor; Involarmi.

**L'amore artigiano** - Ah, che son fuor di me; Che vuoi dir con questi palpiti. **Catone in Utica** - Dovea svenarti allora; Per darvi alcun pegno; Se in campo armato. **L'opera seria** - Barbara e non rammenti; Delfin che al laccio infido; Dove son; Pallid'ombra; Saprei costante e ardita. **Le serve rivali** - Cogli amanti. **La Zingara** - Nessuno consola un povero core. Come sprezza ancora

Ania Vegry sop

NDR Radiophilharmonie / David Stern

CPO © CPO555 057-2 (65' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



*The New Grove Dictionary of Opera* (1992) lists 21 operas by Florian Leopold

Gassmann but most readers would be hard-pressed to name one or locate a recording (there exists a 1995 Bayer set of *La contessina*). The only Gassmann I've knowingly heard was the duet 'Nei giorni tuoi felici' included on a pasticcio version of Metastasio's *L'olimpiade* put together by the Venice Baroque Orchestra (Naïve, 9/12), featuring music by 16 composers. No arias from *L'olimpiade* are included on Ania Vegry's disc for CPO but it does feature a selection of 15 arias drawn from seven of his other operas.

Gassmann was born in Brüx (now Most), a German-speaking part of Bohemia, in 1729. Bert Hagels's lengthy booklet essay includes an account of how the 12-year-old Florian defied his parents' wish for him to follow a trade and headed to Karlsbad where, as an accomplished harpist, he earned enough money (1000 thaler within 14 days) to travel to Venice and Bologna to further his musical education. He was appointed to Emperor Joseph II's court in Vienna, where he taught Antonio Salieri. Sadly, he died young (44) of complications following a fall from a carriage in Italy.

His operas were composed between 1757 and 1773, so Gassmann was on the cusp

between the Baroque and Classical periods. Anyone familiar with Salieri or early Mozart will recognise the style, with elements of the florid showstoppers of the Baroque era.

The disc is well programmed, opening with five arias written for Venice (Gassmann composed operas for six successive Carnival seasons) in *opera seria* style, with trumpets adding pomp, especially in 'Se in campo armato' from *Catone in Utica*. There then follow arias in the *opera buffa* style (Gassmann often set Carlo Goldoni), including five arias from *L'opera seria*, a comic work which parodied the then fading *opera seria* genre.

Vegry's light, agile soprano is well suited to the challenges here. She negotiates coloratura clearly without any hint of strain at the top. She's suitably coquettish in arias from *L'amore artigiano* and dazzles in 'Delfin che al laccio infido' from *L'opera seria*. The latter is an opera Vegry knows well, having sung in staged performances while she was an ensemble member of Hanover State Opera. Conductor David Stern draws alert playing from the NDR Radiophilharmonie. Although 15 arias back to back doesn't make for the most varied listening, it does whet the appetite to hear one of his operas complete. The hour of the Gassmann cometh ... **Mark Pullinger**

## Lemoyne

**Phèdre**

Judith van Wanroij sop..... Phèdre

Julien Behr ten..... Hippolyte

Tassis Christoyannis bar..... Thésée

Melody Louledjian sop..... Oenone

Jérôme Boutillier bar..... Statesman/Hunter

Ludivine Gombert sop..... High Priestess of Venus

Purcell Choir; Orfeo Orchestra / György Vashegyi

Bru Zane © ② BZ1040 (137' • DDD)

Includes synopsis, libretto and translation



The choice of French operas in the Palazzetto Bru Zane's 'Book+CD Series' is wonderfully unpredictable. After

Offenbach's *Maître Péronilla*, praised by Richard Bratby in May, comes this three-act *tragédie lyrique* based on the eponymous play by Racine. It was the first libretto written by François-Benoît Hoffman, who went on to collaborate with a number of other composers: the operas are quite forgotten, save for Cherubini's *Médée*. The part of Phaedra was composed for the leading soprano – more of a mezzo, it seems – at the Paris Opéra. Mme Saint-Huberty led a colourful life: suffice it to say that by 1812 she and her royalist second husband were living by the Thames at Barnes, where they were murdered by a servant who then killed himself. A house in the same row – The Terrace – was later the home of Gustav Holst.

*Phèdre* was the second tragedy to be composed by Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne. First performed at Fontainebleau on October 26, 1786, followed by performances at the Opéra, it was highly successful. According to Benoît Dratwicki's invaluable article, it was staged every year up to 1792. After seven performances in 1795/96 and two in 1813 it disappeared until September 2019, when this recording was made in Budapest.

The obvious operatic comparison would seem to be Rameau's *Hippolyte et Aricie*, which covers the same ground. But there's no Aricia and no appearance of Theseus in the Underworld. The former is no great loss, but the absence of the latter scene (admittedly not to be found in Racine) makes Theseus's entrance at the end of Act 2 dangerously late in the drama. And Act 1 takes a long time to get going, with its hymns and prayers to the goddesses Diana and Venus. This was noted by critics at the time, and – surprisingly – Hoffman and Lemoyne immediately made cuts. Bru Zane gives us the complete work, however, and it makes for enjoyable listening.

Actually it's to Gluck, not Rameau, that one should look for a connection. Whether or not it's true, as a review of Lemoyne's previous opera *Électre* claimed, that Gluck refused to acknowledge the





Much-needed magic: Respighi's ravishingly beautiful *Sleeping Beauty*, in a charming production from Cagliari, casts an evocative spell

younger man as his disciple, there can be no doubt about his influence. *Phèdre* is pervaded with what you might call a noble simplicity; and if Lemoyne can't match Gluck for memorable tunes, he certainly has a gift for intense, declamatory recitative. Other memorable touches include the unexpectedly quiet endings to the first and last acts and the splendour of his orchestration: time and again the trombones add richness and depth to the texture.

Mme Saint-Huberty had sung the part of Hypermnestra in *Les Danaïdes*; five weeks after *Phèdre* she was Camilla in another Salieri premiere, *Les Horaces*. Judith van Wanroij has recorded both roles (Ediciones Singulares, 8/15; Aparté, 11/18), so her casting as Phaedra is entirely appropriate. At one point she even emulates her predecessor by shouting rather than singing. But that was a sign of the deterioration of Mme Saint-Huberty's voice: Wanroij has no such problems. The

passion that she brings to the scene where Phaedra confesses her love to her stepson Hippolytus is as striking as the low-pitched sadness of 'Il ne m'est plus permis de vivre' near the end.

In the absence of Aricia, there is no opportunity for a love scene, but Hippolytus expresses his love for his father in an air that could have been written for Gluck's Admetus or Pylades. Julien Behr sings it with great tenderness, as he does the prayer to Diana at the start of the opera. Tassis Christoyannis could have made a stronger impression with 'De cent brigands j'ai purgé l'univers' at Theseus's entrance, an air that alternates triumph with his pleasure at returning home. But the 'Invocation' when Theseus begs his father Neptune to punish his supposedly incestuous son is thrilling, the vocal line supported by the splendidly rasping trombones.

The other parts are well taken, the most prominent being Oenone,

Phaedra's confidante; and György Vashegyi's conducting of the Purcell Choir and Orfeo Orchestra is as gripping and stylish as ever. The illustrations include two portraits of Mme Saint-Huberty and two of Gluck but none, sadly, of Lemoyne himself.

Richard Lawrence

## Respighi



### La bella dormiente nel bosco

**Veta Pilipenko** *mez* ..... Queen/Old Lady/Frog  
**Angela Nisi** *sop* ..... The Princess  
**Antonio Gandía** *ten* ..... Prince Aprile  
**Vincenzo Taormina** *bar* ..... King/Ambassador  
**Shoushik Barsoumian** *sop* ..... The Blue Fairy  
**Lara Rotili** *mez* ..... Green Fairy/Cat/Duchess/Cuckoo  
**Claudia Urru** *sop* ..... Spindle/Nightingale  
**Enrico Zara** *ten* ..... Mister Dollar/Jester/Doctor  
**Nicola Ebau** *bar* ..... Lumberjack/Doctor  
**Francesco Leone** *bass* ..... Doctor  
**Marco Puggioni** *ten* ..... Doctor  
**Orchestra and Chorus of the Teatro Lirico di Cagliari / Donato Renzetti**



Stage director **Leo Muscato**

Video director **Tiziano Mancini**

Naxos (DVD) 2 110655; (Blu-ray) NBD0106V

(88' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Teatro Lirico, Cagliari,

February 7-10, 2017

Includes synopsis



Respighi's *Sleeping Beauty* began life in 1922 as a small-scale piece, commissioned by the puppeteer

Vittorio Podresca for performance at the Teatro dei Piccoli, a children's theatre in Rome, and only reached its definitive form in 1934, when Respighi reworked the score as a full-scale opera for its stage premiere in Turin the same year. We know too little, regrettably, about its first incarnation, of which only Respighi's piano score survives. The revision, however, is one of his finest operas, at once ravishingly beautiful and capable, I suspect, of casting its considerable spell on adults and children alike.

Its success lies in Respighi's ability to weave together an eclectic multiplicity of styles and genres into a wonderfully consistent whole. As one might expect, Impressionism and post-Romanticism rub shoulders with formal numbers derived from early music. Piano cascades and shimmering strings evoke a fairyland not far removed from the Janiculum sequence from *Pines of Rome*, while the court rituals have much of the elegance and grace of *The Birds* or *La boutique fantasque*. A grotesque gavotte introduces us to four useless Doctors, who vainly try to revive the Princess with science, and the second act closes with a Stravinskian ballet of Spiders, who spin cobwebs round the sleepers in the castle.

The libretto, by Gian Bistolfi, is for the most part witty but can, however, turn heavy-handed. Bistolfi's decision to let his heroine sleep not for a century but for three hundred years allows Respighi both to waken her at the time of composition and to add cakewalks and foxtrots into the mix in the final scenes. The Blue Fairy's prediction, however, that the Princess will be roused from slumber by 'the raptures of April' also pulls in a portentous Symbolist gloss that equates her awakening with the arrival of spring: the Prince himself is called Aprile, and his first kiss is the prelude to a big, almost Straussian love

duet that sits a bit uneasily with the rest of the score.

It's also very much an ensemble piece, with no one role allowed to dominate, though Respighi's vocal writing is nothing if not exacting, which ultimately makes for an opera that ultimately lacks a star vehicle but which at the same time is difficult to cast successfully. The challenges are more than met, however, in this beautiful DVD of Leo Muscato's 2017 Cagliari production, exquisitely conducted by Donato Renzetti. Angela Nisi makes a fine, silvery-toned Princess, tellingly naive in her opening scenes but wakening to more adult emotions when faced with Antonio Gandía's ardent, handsome-voiced Prince. Shoushik Barsoumian does ravishing things with the Blue Fairy's coloratura, for which Stravinsky's Nightingale to some extent served as the model. The rest of the cast are consistently good and take multiple roles, all of them exuberantly characterised.

The staging, meanwhile, is a thing of great charm. Muscato kicks off the proceedings in the 18th century, which allows Nisi to awaken in the present day. The opening is really lovely, as birds and a chorus of frogs, sheltering under umbrellas, ruefully observe the Ambassador's awkward attempts to summon the Fairies to the Princess's christening. Knitting has, for some reason, replaced spinning in the scene where the Princess pricks her finger; but later on there's genuine enchantment as a corps de ballet of mice bear the sleeping Princess to her moon-shaped bed before the Spiders weave their cobwebs over the sleeping court. The whole thing provides some much-needed magic at a time when we really could do with it most. I loved every second of it. **Tim Ashley**

## Sullivan • Cellier • Ford

**Sullivan Haddon Hall**

**Ed Lyon** *ten* ..... John Manners

**Henry Waddington** *bass-bar* ..... Sir George Vernon

**Adrian Thompson** *ten* ..... Oswald

**Ben McAteer** *bar* ..... Rupert Vernon

**Donald Maxwell** *bar* ..... McCrankie

**Sarah Tynan** *sop* ..... Dorothy Vernon

**Fiona Kimm** *mez* ..... Lady Vernon

**Angela Simkin** *mez* ..... Dorcas

**Cellier Captain Billy**

**Ben McAteer** *bar* ..... Captain Billy

**Ed Lyon** *ten* ..... Christopher Jolly

**Henry Waddington** *bass-bar* ..... Samuel Chunk

**Fiona Kimm** *mez* ..... Widow Jackson

**Eleanor Dennis** *sop* ..... Polly

**Ford Mr Jericho**

**Henry Waddington** *bass-bar* ..... Michael de Vere

**Ed Lyon** *ten* ..... Horace Alexander de Vere

**Ben McAteer** *bar* ..... Mr Jericho

**Fiona Kimm** *mez* ..... Lady Bushey

**Eleanor Dennis** *sop* ..... Winifred

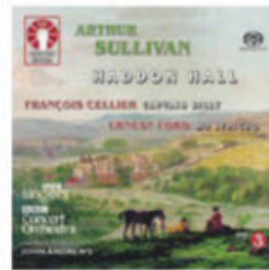
**BBC Singers; BBC Concert Orchestra /**

**John Andrews**

Dutton (M) (2) (CD) 2CDLX7372 (151' • DDD)

Librettos available to download from

[duttonvocalion.co.uk](http://duttonvocalion.co.uk)



Dutton is spoiling us. Not content to give us the first fully professional

recording of Sullivan and Grundy's 'original light English opera' *Haddon Hall*, the company has gone further and recreated what is effectively a whole evening's entertainment at the Savoy circa 1893. In line with period practice, *Haddon Hall* is the central panel of a triple bill, flanked by a pair of brief one-act operettas. Any number of these tuneful squibs – English descendants of Offenbach's one-acters – flitted across the Victorian stage, though only *Trial by Jury* survives today. The excellent booklet notes to this two-disc set reveal the feat of musical archaeology that enabled Dutton to revive the pair recorded here.

So let's deal with them first. Ernest Ford's *Mr Jericho* and Francois Cellier's *Captain Billy* are, unsurprisingly, frothy affairs, but the vivacity and catchiness of the music is utterly delightful and the scoring in particular is surely much finer than it ever needed to be. No surprise there from Sullivan's one-time assistant Cellier (whose operetta *Dorothy* out-sold *The Mikado* in its day). But it's the jaunty theme song of Ben McAteer's jam-maker Jericho that has lodged immovably in my ear, sung (like everything here) with a warm-toned humour that never degenerates into mere 'character' singing. It's hard to imagine that Richard D'Oyly Carte's hard-working repertory company performed these pieces with anything like the sensitivity and finesse that they receive here from John Andrews and his cast.

That same polish, vivacity and sense of style pays glorious dividends in *Haddon Hall* – written by Sullivan while his relationship with Gilbert was unravelling, in an idiom somewhere between *Ruddigore* and *Ivanhoe*. George Bernard Shaw felt that it was one of the



finest of the Savoy Operas, and there are points in this tale of love and elopement during the English Civil War – such as Act 2's nocturnal storms and the pathos of the dispossessed Sir George and Lady Vernon in Act 3 – that definitely feel more like a *dramma giocoso* than an *opera buffa*.

But it's inescapably true that the individual characters in Sydney Grundy's libretto are less vividly drawn than Gilbert's, and that a little of the comic Scotsman McCrankie goes a very long way. (Dutton omits the spoken dialogue but it can be downloaded from their website, if you need proof that its absence is a blessing.) Anyway, thanks to Dutton, you can make up your own mind. Andrews draws both grandeur and poetry from the BBC Concert Orchestra; there's a dancelike spring to Sullivan's rhythms and his orchestration – whether wry bassoon countermelodies or feather-light woodwind cascades – glows like never before.

The choral singing is characterful and alert, and there isn't a single member of the cast who doesn't sound entirely committed to their role, with Sarah Tynan and Ed Lyon ardent and sweet-toned as the young lovers John and Dorothy, McAteer lyrical as well as droll as the scheming suitor Rupert and performances of sonorous dignity from Henry Waddington and Fiona Kimm as the senior Vernons. The words are clearly enunciated and stylishly phrased but they're always expressively sung – no old-school Savoy barking and blustering here. In fact, I'd say that for the quality of the performances, as well as the imaginative choice of repertoire, this recording sets a new standard in the presentation of English light opera on disc. More, please! **Richard Bratby**

## Verdi

### Nabucco

**Amartuvshin Enkhbat** *bar*..... Nabucco  
**Ivan Magri** *ten*..... Ismaele  
**Michele Pertusi** *bass*..... Zaccaria  
**Saïoa Hernández** *sop*..... Abigaille  
**Annalisa Stroppa** *mez*..... Fenena  
**Gianluca Breda** *bass*..... High Priest  
**Manuel Pierattelli** *ten*..... Abdallo  
**Elisabetta Zizzo** *sop*..... Anna

**Chorus of the Teatro Regio, Parma;**

**Arturo Toscanini Philharmonic Orchestra /**

**Francesco Ivan Ciampa**

*Stage director* **Stefano Ricci**

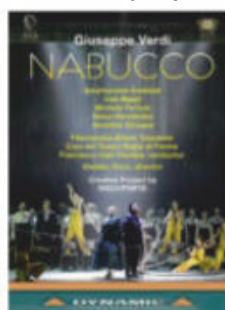
*Video directors* **Matteo Ricchetti, Adriano Figari**

Dynamic 37867; 57867

(160' • NTSC • 1080i • 16:9 • DTS-HD MA5.1, DD5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live, September 29, 2019

Includes synopsis



The Verdi Festival in Parma produced an austere and compelling production of *Il trovatore* in 2018 (in the rare

French edition, *Le trouvère*). Last year's flagship new production sets us adrift, literally, for *Nabucco*, the composer's first hit. Apparently partly inspired by Wong Kar-wai's elegiac sci-fi drama *2046*, the action takes place on a warship in a dystopian future.

This is a much more uneven production than *Le trouvère* but is distinguished by excellent, all-guns-blazing singing and very fine conducting from Francesco Ivan Ciampa. He encourages the Filarmonica Arturo Toscanini to bring a depth to the score that retains the swagger and dash of early Verdi but also finds a nobility and grandeur that points to later triumphs. The chorus of Parma's Teatro Regio are a little stretched by the end of the night but they draw out the limpid, desolate beauty

of 'Va, pensiero' – and Ciampa leads a lingering diminuendo at the close of the number which is really stirring.

The show is styled as a 'creative project', attributed to Ricci/Forte, directed by Stefano Ricci. In recent years many Italian houses that fancy a crack at something avant-garde have opted for productions such as this, which are more like art installations than fluid theatrical stagings. The visual cues – if you know *2046*, no doubt there will be more connections – include references to *Handmaid's Tale*-like theocracies, migrants in lifejackets (nodding to a contemporary crisis on Italian shores) and state censorship. Michele Pertusi's Zaccaria wears a dog collar and his fellow Hebrews look like affluent Italians of today. If this is a dystopia, it seems an unlikely future where Baal's minions still use old-fashioned pens and clipboards.

All of this, including a 'human sea' of dancers who sometimes interrupt or interact with the protagonists, is seriously and soberly presented but does little to enhance the performances. Whichever way you cut it, Verdi writes for outsize personalities in the grip of religious, romantic or political crisis (sometimes all three). The contrast between Pertusi's grizzled, affecting Zaccaria and Amartuvshin Enkhbat's velvety-voiced Nabucco is instructive. Pertusi's *bel canto* phrasing and use of the text surmounts the vagueness of the minute-by-minute direction; Enkhbat never punches through. Still, the Mongolian has a beautiful instrument.

The tenor Ivan Magri confirms his rising talent as an anorak-sporting Ismaele (pity the character simply disappears halfway through). The two daughters of Nabucco, while stranded with one-note personas, are sung with fervour: Annalisa Stroppa's warm mezzo impresses as Fenena and the ice-blond

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Saioa Hernández throws her considerable resources at the highs and lows of Abigaille's fearsome music. The Verdi Festival can be proud of finding so many classy Verdian voices. **Neil Fisher**

## Verdi

### Otello

**Jonas Kaufmann** *ten*.....Otello  
**Carlos Álvarez** *bar*.....Iago  
**Federica Lombardi** *sop*.....Desdemona  
**Liparit Avetisyan** *ten*.....Cassio  
**Carlo Bosi** *ten*.....Roderigo  
**Riccardo Fassi** *bass*.....Lodovico  
**Fabrizio Beggi** *bass*.....Montano  
**Gian Paolo Flocchi** *bass*.....Herald  
**Virginie Verrez** *mez*.....Emilia  
**Chorus and Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia / Sir Antonio Pappano**  
 Sony Classical © ② 19439 70793-2 (135' • DDD)  
 Includes synopsis



Two years after the DVD/Blu-ray release of Jonas Kaufmann's first Otello in the

theatre (A/18), here is a full studio remake, from the same address as the Gramophone Award-winning *Aida* that gave us Kaufmann's Radamès (A/15). The tenor's first complete studio opera recording for Sony Classical (and the first studio *Otello* in 27 years) doesn't quite have the same no-expense-spared feel as Warner's effort with its predecessor, and is marred from the start by the cloying, gushing hagiography of a booklet note that announces the recording's greatness before one's even heard a note.

The sound that Sony's engineers capture in Rome's Auditorium Parco della Musica feels less refined than Warner Classics' for *Aida*, too, with a slight lack of precision and a rather two-dimensional sound picture. It also compares unfavourably to DG's detailed sound for that last *Otello*, recorded in Paris under Myung-Whun Chung. One regularly catches the sound of Pappano on the podium, too, as he encourages his players to stoke the fire of this great drama. It's a forceful, visceral reading of the score that packs an irresistible punch, but which could do more to capture the refined lyricism and stately grandeur that are also such essential parts of the work. But the conductor's enormous experience with the piece in the theatre pays significant dividends, especially in its second half.

Reviewing Kaufmann's filmed *Otello*, I wrote that his performance gave the

sense of 'a role being expertly negotiated rather than lived', and, although he had also notched up a Munich production before going into the studio, that feeling remains. Vocal decisions and dramatic decisions don't as yet always feel seamlessly aligned: certain floated phrases still feel a little self-conscious and moments in 'Dio! Mi potevi' over-mediated. Elsewhere, though, the tenor bares his dramatic teeth impressively and to powerful effect; he is nobly moving in the final scene.

But the characterisation is also held back by the fact that, although he has all the notes and plenty of power, the voice itself sounds short on juice, the timbre lacking in colour and depth, with little of the necessary trumpeting ring at the top. Comparison with the experienced Domingo on the Chung recording might seem unfair but it gives an indication of what's missing.

Carlos Álvarez's Iago is perfectly respectable, with plenty of powerful, rich tone, but he sounds unimaginative, too, in comparison with Chung's oily-voiced, insidious Sergei Leiferkus, not to mention other great Iagos on record. Federica Lombardi, though, is a lovely Desdemona: her timbre is appealingly soft, but there's no shortage of strength either vocally or in terms of characterisation. Liparit Avetisyan is a suitably ardent Cassio, and Carlo Bosi an unusually vivid and engaging Roderigo. The rest of the secondary cast is solid.

Kaufmann's many fans needn't hesitate, and this is certainly a useful, if not necessarily essential complement to the filmed performance: a solid, impressive achievement but not a recording that's likely to replace anyone's existing top choices in this great work.

**Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparison:*

*Chung* (12/94) (DG) 439 805-2GH2

## Weber

### Der Freischütz

**Jessica Muirhead** *sop*.....Agathe  
**Maximilian Schmitt** *ten*.....Max  
**Tamara Banješević** *sop*.....Aennchen  
**Heiko Trinsinger** *bar*.....Caspar  
**Martijn Cornet** *bar*.....Ottokar  
**Tijl Faveyts** *bass*.....Hermit  
**Karel Martin Ludvik** *bass-bar*.....Cuno  
**Albrecht Kludzuweit** *ten*.....Kilian  
**Aalto Theatre Choruses; Essen Philharmonic Orchestra / Tomáš Netopil**  
 Oehms © ② OC988 (123' • DDD)  
 Recorded live, December 2018  
 Includes synopsis and libretto



With Janowski's new recording of this opera (Pentatone, 2/20)

and the Vienna *Euryanthe* on both CD and DVD (Capriccio, 11/19; Naxos, 6/20), there appears to be something of a (welcome) Weber revival on disc. Essen's previous recordings have been of rarer repertoire (*Hans Heiling*, *Le prophète*, *Asrael*) but the especial focus of this live *Freischütz* must have seemed worth preserving.

Arguably the stars here are Netopil and the orchestra. The players may be outranked by status in recorded competition but their conductor's always dancelike pointing of the score and careful delivery of Weber's ever-precise dynamics (especially when things get loud or spooky) make this a treasurable performance to return to. It also sounds well gauged to the capabilities of the cast, which includes a lighter than usual Caspar and a heavier than usual Aennchen. Both romantic leads, Muirhead and Schmitt, are intense but refreshingly not over-weighty.

The spoken text follows Kind's dramaturgy and his atmosphere while being trimmed a little by the production's stage director, Tatjana Gürbaca. There are a couple of modish adjustments to get used to but even without the advantage of a video these seem to work quite well, and even rather to amplify the *opéra comique* aspect of the work. Samiel's part is spoken by the chorus *unisono* and is effective and still ghostly (apart from becoming a little inaudible at the start of the Wolf's Glen scene). Also, head ranger Cuno's narration of the magic bullet legend is divided up between chorus voices – again, no harm done. The live recording (from three performances) has a couple of jumpy edits where it's hard to know if they're duplicating what happened onstage – most extremely, Act 2 begins very *attacca* indeed on the end of Caspar's black aria 'Schweig ...'. And some of the pauses in the dialogue might have been trimmed without the advantage of a picture to watch. The booklet's libretto has no English translation – a shame with this sometimes tricky text – and makes a mess of the Act 2 scene 1 Trio when Max departs for the Wolf's Glen.

As I have hinted, the rich *Freischütz* catalogue (especially the Kleibers, Keilberth and Harnoncourt) provides





Parma's Verdi Festival presents Nabucco set on a warship in a dystopian future – see review on page 79

starry competition on carefully edited recordings. Here the natural joy of a live occasion and the work of the conductor have something valuable to offer and should not be overlooked. **Mike Ashman**

## 'The Other Cleopatra'

'Queen of Armenia'

**Gluck** *Il Tigrane* – Nero turbo il ciel imbruna; Presso l'onda; Priva del caro bene **Hasse** *Il Tigrane* – Overture; Che gran pena; Degli'Elisi alle campagne; Press'all'onde; Strappami pure il seno; Vuoi ch'io t'oda? **Vivaldi** *Il Tigrane* – Lascierà l'amata; Qui mentre mormorando; Squarciami pure il seno

**Isabel Bayrakdarian** *sop* **Jory Vinikour** *hpd*

**Kaunas City Symphony Orchestra /**

**Constantine Orbelian**

Delos © DE3591 (64' • DDD)

Includes texts and translations



Isabel Bayrakdarian's superb recital with Tafelmusik (CBC, 7/05) presented key

moments for the famous Egyptian Cleopatra by Handel, Mattheson, Hasse and Graun. Nearly two decades later, her follow-up focuses on 'the other Cleopatra', daughter of Mithridates VI of Pontus and wife of King Tigranes II of Armenia, all drawn from three treatments of the libretto *Il Tigrane* attributed here (and elsewhere) to Francesco Silvani, but perhaps written by Pietro Antonio Bernardini.

Bayrakdarian's voice has evolved; what was formerly crystalline and effortless is now darker and forceful. Constantine Orbelian nurtures shapely accompaniments from the Lithuanian orchestra, assisted by expert harpsichordist Jory Vinikour. Most selections from Hasse's setting (Naples, 1729) sound much the same in tone, style and personality – whether Cleopatra's haughtiness at a rival ('Vuoi chi'io t'oda?'), remorse after maltreating her faithful lover ('Che gran pena traffige il mio core') or resolve to die and enter the Elysian Fields ('Degli'Elisi alle campagne l'alma fida').

Vivaldi's music for Act 2 of a collaborative production (Rome, 1724) includes the heroine falling asleep in a beautiful garden during the cavatina 'Qui mentre mormorando' (violins play over arpeggiating violas and solo cello without basses), and she takes a firm heroic stand in 'Squarciami pure il seno' (the orchestra is short on textural vitality). Three arias from Gluck's setting (Crema, 1743) come across best: horns and rushing strings propel stormy tension in 'Nero turbo il ciel imbruna', and Cleopatra's confession that she cannot love the man she is being forced to marry ('Priva del caro bene') is underpinned by sympathetic strings – although the tenderness of the moment is diminished by pinched singing. Gluck's vivid 'Presso l'onda d'Acheronte' (solo horn calls and passages for two oboes) is a more feverish vision of Acheron than Hasse's polite setting of the same words. The music-making is a curate's egg but Baroque opera twitchers might be curious to hear Hasse and Gluck selections never recorded before. **David Vickers**



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The Editors of Gramophone's sister music magazines, Jazzwise and Songlines, recommend some of their favourite recordings from the past month

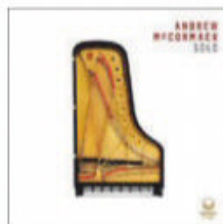
# Jazz

Brought to you by **jazzwise**

## Andrew McCormack

Solo

Ubuntu Music © UBU0059



Andrew McCormack has led bands from classic acoustic trios to hook-reciting, mathematically groove-tight electric outfits, but this is the imaginative solo piano debut he has sounded more than capable of for at least a decade. He recorded much of this music throughout 2016, but observes that it was only last year that he began to appreciate they were opening up a new soundworld – an insight he turned into a set full of double-taking twists, idiomatic variety and virtuosity harnessed by narrative. He gracefully balances delicacy of touch, romantically swooping themes, rocking grooves, and constant shifts of harmony on the opening 'Dream Catcher', arrestingly

juggles motifs and register leaps on the initially quietly-vamping 'Crystal Glass' and the stridently walking 'Nomad', delivers a breezier but devoted cover of Thelonious Monk's 'We See' that seems to mingle baroque music and the Charleston, and mixes Stravinsky into a borderline-abstract version of the standard song 'I Can't Believe That You're In Love With Me'. This is a terrific solo piano set. **John Fordham**

## Redman/Mehldau/McBride/Blade

RoundAgain

Nonesuch ©



What could be the first supergroup of the post-pandemic era is actually the reincarnation of Joshua Redman's original mid-1990s quartet. Recording just one album together – the saxophonist's third

CD *MoodSwing* from 1994 – these eminent Generation X-ers were together about a year and a half before striking out on their own unique creative pathways. Redman and Mehldau have been the closest collaborators since the ensemble split, and they show an innate empathy on the new recording *RoundAgain*.

With originals split between band members – Joshua Redman (three), Brad Mehldau (two) and Christian McBride and Brian Blade one each – things are kept tightly structured and strong themes hit convivial grooves for the most part. The soloing is of a very high calibre as you'd expect, with McBride a notable contributor in particular. There's certainly room for the band to grow and loosen up as a collective and we can only hope there's not so long a wait until live touring comes back on the agenda. In the meantime *RoundAgain* works as a satisfying appetizer. **Selwyn Harris**

# World Music

Brought to you by **SONGLINES**

## Joseph Tawadros

Betrayal of a Sacred Sunflower

JT Records ©



The oud player and composer Joseph Tawadros has worked tirelessly over the last decade to move his instrument into new musical areas. Recent projects have seen him collaborating with symphony orchestras and New York contemporary jazz stars, but *Betrayal of a Sacred Sunflower* is a more understated affair, with only a small ensemble of excellent musicians accompanying him on piano, violin, electric guitar and occasional trombone.

The oud and electric guitar seldom seem to marry together well and it's testament to Tawadros' musical judgement that the spare textures created here allow his inventive

improvisations to blossom. It's high praise to compare the album's wistful mood to Anouar Brahem's ravishing *Le Pas du Chat Noir*; however, there are also moments of genuine fun and anyone doubting the oud's ability to be a groovy funk-machine need only listen to 'On the Flipside'. A delightful recording. **Bill Badley**

## Maria Kalaniemi & Eero Grundström

Mielo

Åkerö Records ©



It's hard to get beyond the first track *Erämorsian*. I play it again and again, caught up in its aching melody, enchanted by the most exquisite accordion playing. Maria Kalaniemi is known as the 'Queen of Finnish Accordion' but there's something

angelic about *Mielo* too. Kalaniemi enlightens us: 'Mielo is for me the powerful, empowering and multifaceted musical story of growing my own inner wings.'

Kalaniemi has influenced countless musicians, in Finland and across the world, with her phrasing and breathing, her attention to detail, her sound, collaborations and compositions. Mielo (Mind) is a walk in the woods, nature representing life. Kalaniemi is joined by harmonium player Eero Grundström; his contributions here add a depth, a grounding to an album of immense beauty. Nor is it without wit and mischief, melancholy and lament, a wisp of tango, an ancient folk song; the intimate 'Lohtulaulu' (Song of Solace), the birds of 'Metsähanhet' (Woodland Geese) honk away in nature's music, until finally we disappear into the enigmatic 'Pilvet' (Clouds). Precious time spent with outstanding musicians. **Fiona Talkington**

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# REISSUES & ARCHIVE

Our monthly guide to the most exciting catalogue releases, historic issues and box-sets

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## Berlin's other orchestra

**Richard Osborne** takes a tour through the Staatskapelle's history on record

First, forget 450 years, the headline date of this anthology of recordings by the orchestra of the Berlin Royal – later State – Opera. Not that the set's handsomely produced 180-page booklet provides much in the way of historical background for the pre-1919 era or, indeed, for the 70 years following 1919, during which the players of the renamed Staatskapelle Berlin led a see-saw existence as employees of the Prussian state – a semi-autonomous entity in both Weimar and Nazi Germany – and, after 1945, of the Soviet-controlled East German government.

We first encounter a Royal Prussian Court Orchestra in 1701; in 1742 Frederick the Great created Berlin's Royal Opera. As for the Opera's modern history, that could be said to date from around 1821, the year its famously enlightened Intendant Count Karl von Brühl oversaw the premiere of Weber's *Der Freischütz*, somewhat to the discomfiture of his recently appointed music director, rival composer Gaspare Spontini.

We go back to Spontini's time, and that of his more enlightened successor Giacomo Meyerbeer, with two items included on DG's so-called 'bonus' CD of shorter pieces from the 78rpm era. One is a characteristically well-groomed 1939 Paul van Kempen recording of the *Freischütz* Overture; the other is a thrilling account, conducted by Max von Schillings, of the Overture to Wagner's *Der fliegende Holländer*, the as yet unperformed work which in December 1841 Meyerbeer commended in the warmest imaginable terms to the Berlin Opera. Though this was a lifesaver for the 27-year-old Wagner, he felt no compunction about pillorying Meyerbeer in his 1850 polemic 'Judaism in Music'.

The Berlin court musicians were slower to create a reputable concert-giving orchestra than their colleagues in Dresden, Leipzig or Vienna. It was Karl Muck (heard here

conducting Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll*), Felix Weingartner and, finally, Richard Strauss who turned the orchestra's Thursday evening concerts into must-attend events. It's right, then, that Strauss heads this 15-CD conductor-led retrospective.

The first six discs are devoted to a sextet of conductors who played a role in the Staatskapelle concerts and the affairs of the State Opera in the years 1919-45: Strauss, Leo Blech, Otto Klemperer, Erich Kleiber, Herbert von Karajan and, more tangentially, Wilhelm Furtwängler.

### Even the BPO could barely have improved on these Staatskapelle realisations of two of Strauss's own works

Furtwängler had a brief spell in charge of concerts in the early 1920s (no recordings were made) but didn't set foot in the Opera itself until 1931. Indeed, his only recording with the Staatskapelle dates from October 1947, when he led a decidedly rough-and-ready performance of *Tristan und Isolde* with a less than adequate Isolde, Erna Schlüter. Act 2 of that performance makes up disc 6. Not that Furtwängler is the set's most egregious inclusion. The bearer of that palm is Sergiu Celibidache (disc 9), Barenboim's choice, his preface tells us. Celibidache conducted no opera in Berlin and appeared with the orchestra on just three occasions.

In 1923, the year the Staatskapelle concerts lost Furtwängler, the Opera lost Leo Blech, a wonderful conductor who had been a linchpin of the institution since 1906. The Blech disc (CD 2) is superb. As well as some spellbinding Bizet and a thrilling account of Mozart's Symphony No 34, there is near-flawless support for Friedrich Schorr in two classic Wagner recordings – the closing scene of *Das Rheingold* and Wotan's Farewell – that

quickly became reference points for any Wotan with ears to hear.

With Klemperer at loggerheads with the State Opera's first post-war Intendant, Max von Schillings, and with Alexander Zemlinsky and Bruno Walter both turning down invitations to succeed Blech, the post went to the 32-year-old Erich Kleiber. Despite the stellar reputation Kleiber enjoyed in London and elsewhere after his return in 1950 from 16 years in South America, he was not regarded in Berlin in the 1920s as anything other than a half-decent Kapellmeister. He had his successes (the 1925 premiere of Berg's *Wozzeck*) but none that is reflected here. His recordings of Smetana's 'Vltava' (1928) and Dvořák's *New World* Symphony (1929) are crudely unidiomatic, while a live 1955 Beethoven Fifth is a travesty beside the rather good studio recording he made for Decca in Amsterdam in 1953.

Hans Keller once wrote that Klemperer was a bit rowdy in his middle years, though with increasing sublimation his rowdiness underwent a metamorphosis 'into unflinching, ruthless relevance'. We experience both in a wildly unintegrated Staatskapelle recording of Brahms's First Symphony. Given that Klemperer was bipolar, you never quite knew what you were going to get. Thus the finale, recorded in June 1928, sounds fairly manic, whereas the slow movement, recorded the previous December, is as calm as it is profound. The best thing here is Kurt Weill's wind-band suite from *Die Dreigroschenoper*, a concert piece Klemperer himself commissioned.

The Richard Strauss anthology begins with his classically direct yet subtly adjusted 1927 recording of Mozart's Symphony No 40. The Berlin Philharmonic's strings might have added a further layer of refinement. But even that orchestra could barely have improved on these Staatskapelle realisations of two of Strauss's own works, where the orchestra's operatic





Franz Konwitschny directed the Staatskapelle Berlin from 1955 until his death in 1962

pedigree, its sense of character and evolving drama, is everywhere apparent. Strauss's *Eulenspiegel* is a real rascal, uproariousness personified, and there's much to glean from this 1933 recording of *Don Quixote*, despite a perfunctory end and the fact that Strauss is none too fussed about many of those quieter, more nuanced dynamic markings with which the score is littered. The transfers, I should add, are the smoothest DG has yet given us, the surfaces barely audible.

Strauss thought the 33-year-old Karajan a bit of an *Eulenspiegel* after spying him conducting *Elektra* in the State Opera without a score ('Look, look, the rascal!'). Karajan seems to have transformed the Staatskapelle's sound the moment he stood in front of it: witness these 1938 debut recordings of the overtures to *Die Zauberflöte* and *La forza del destino*, the latter a performance of searing beauty that surpasses even Karajan's own 1975 Berlin Philharmonic remake. The orchestra play gloriously in the finale of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony, recorded in September 1944 in good-quality stereophonic sound (one of the strangest of all tales of wartime recording, undocumented in the booklet essay). They also play with good discipline in Karajan's 1941 account of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony, a work (as he later admitted) he had not yet entirely mastered.

The rebuilt State Opera opened in 1955 with a performance of *Die Meistersinger*. Erich Kleiber, due to return to his former post as Generalmusikdirektor, should have conducted but resigned to be replaced by Franz Konwitschny, who now added Berlin to an East German portfolio that already included Leipzig and Dresden. We hear Act 1, with Gerhard Unger as an outstanding David, eager and youthful-sounding, Josef Herrmann as a light-voiced Sachs, and the Pogner, Theo Adam, already sounding like a Sachs-in-waiting.

Rather more engrossing, however, are the first two acts of Verdi's *Macbeth* starring Martha Mödl as Lady Macbeth in a 1950 radio transmission conducted by Joseph Keilberth who, like Karajan, was no mean Verdian. Astrid Varnay spoke of Mödl's 'incorruptible authenticity of delineation and profound sense of identification with a character', all of which is blazingly evident here. The performance is in German; but, as Rossini remarked, German works better for Italian than any other European language. We don't get the Sleepwalking scene in these particular acts; for that you need to go to the complete two-CD reissue on Walhall.

Since Konwitschny's death in 1962, the orchestra has had just two directors, the musicianly but essentially innocuous

Austrian-born Otmar Suitner (1922-2010), who led the Opera from 1964 to 1990, and Daniel Barenboim, who took over in 1992. The Suitner disc begins with a charming run-through of one of his party pieces, Paul Dessau's 1965 'Symphonic Adaptation' of Mozart's E flat String Quintet. Mozart mugged by a Marxist, you might say, except that Mozart would probably have wet himself laughing at the transcription, not least in the finale, where the orchestration has an Ibert-like wit and irreverence.

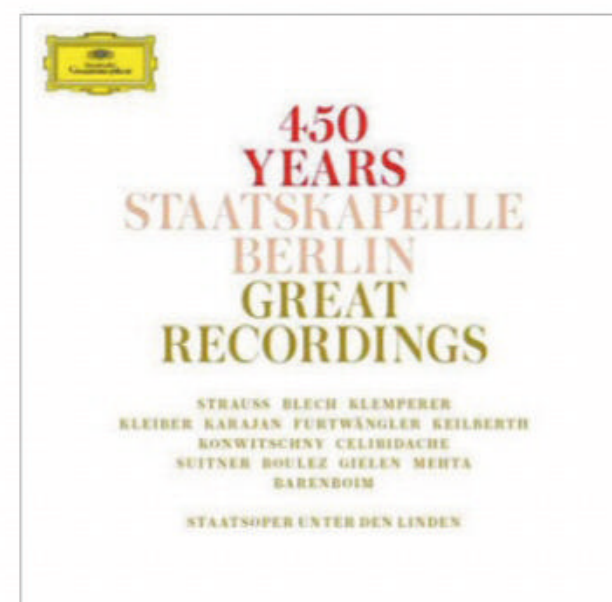
The four CDs representing the Barenboim years contain no opera, and three concerts of no great distinction. There's a certain residual trenchancy to the 84-year-old Pierre Boulez's conducting of Mahler's Sixth Symphony, though it seems a bit of an uphill slog for the orchestra, with little of that ease of address (in the best sense of the term) we hear in Boulez's 1994 Vienna Philharmonic recording (DG, 6/95). By far the best of the four discs documents Barenboim's own 2010 performance of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony. Originally released as an Accentus DVD (9/13), this is a most interesting reading, high on drama in the outer movements yet blessed with an almost Schubert-like lyricism and grace in the inner ones.

This, rather than disc 14, should have concluded the set, given that this 'Zubin Mehta' volume – in effect a second Barenboim CD in which he appears as soloist in two piano concertos – seems surplus to requirements. The first item is a fine account of Beethoven's C minor Concerto. It's followed, however, by an eccentric and not particularly well-played performance of Tchaikovsky's First Concerto that's more Barnum & Bailey than Staatskapelle Berlin. ⑥

## THE RECORDINGS

### 450 Years Staatskapelle Berlin – Great Recordings

DG ③ ⑤ 483 7887GM15





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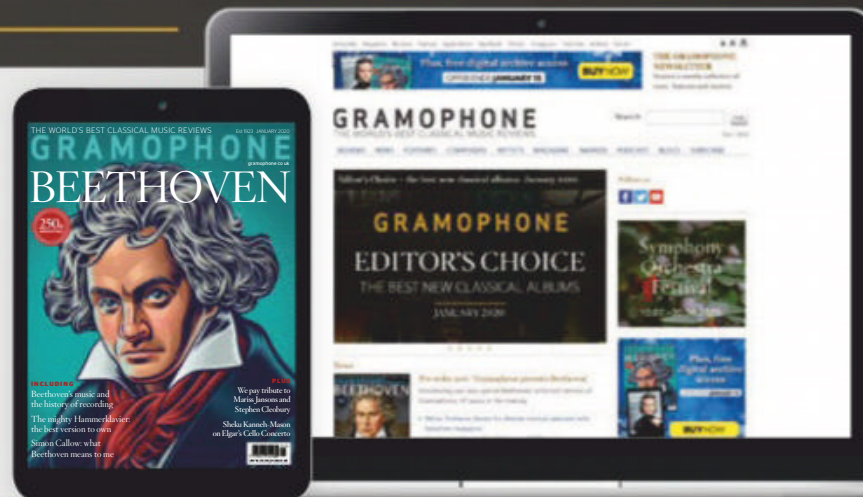


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# BOX-SET *Round-up*

**Rob Cowan** revisits packages ranging from Romantics and moderns to sacred classics

Rarely have I enjoyed a creative compilation as much as I've relished Capriccio's enterprising 10-disc **Modern Times Edition**, where the conductor Karl-Heinz Steffens inspires the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz to give their all in a programme that ranges from Bernd Alois Zimmermann's juggernaut *Photopsis* to Vaughan Williams's rather gentler *Fantasia on Sussex Folk Tunes* for cello and orchestra (with soloist Martin Rummel). The other composers represented, each with a disc to himself, are Dallapiccola, Dutilleux, Ginastera, Szymanowski, Antheil, Kabalevsky, Krenek and Hindemith. A bonus DVD features, in addition to a complete performance of Ginastera's *Creole Faust Overture* (which is also on the Ginastera disc), extensive videoed interviews with Steffens and various of his soloists including the pianist Eva Kupiec, who we see thunder her way through the 'brutality' (her word) of the finale of Szymanowski's Fourth Symphony or *Sinfonia concertante*. The pianist Frank Dupree talks about the 'bad boy of music' George Antheil, the high-kicking *Jazz Symphony* having sprung to life just a year after Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. But what's really remarkable is the authentic way Steffens and his players have absorbed the styles of 10 very different composers, bringing out the essential Englishness of Vaughan Williams and performing Hindemith as if he's a fully fledged Romantic. The whole venture, which is captured in excellent sound, bespeaks enormous enthusiasm and I can't recommend it highly enough. Maybe Steffens and Capriccio could think in terms of a second volume, centring on the likes of Karl Amadeus Hartmann, Pavel Haas, Albert Roussel, Arnold Bax, Grażyna Bacewicz, Roy Harris (the Sixth Symphony especially), Eduard Tubin, Mieczysław Weinberg, Rued Langgaard and Alexander Zemlinsky.

Venturing on to more familiar ground, Oehms has released a pleasing and exceptionally well-recorded collection of **Richard Strauss** tone poems featuring a notably warm-sounding Frankfurt Opera

and Museums Orchestra under Sebastian Weigle. Not for Weigle and his orchestra the cut-glass precision of Reiner in Chicago or the plusher contours of Karajan in Berlin, or even Ormandy in Philadelphia (see Replay), but performances that favour a natural, unmannered playing style that, while showing due appreciation of the music's Romantic ground springs, invariably keeps a level head. Mind you, the *Alpine Symphony*'s 'storm' certainly makes an impact and if Till Eulenspiegel is less the rascal he usually is, he makes up for it with a smiling countenance. All the tone poems are included (*Macbeth* being one of them), their projection well judged if occasionally more muted, even laid-back than their more animated rivals.

## What's remarkable is the way Steffens and his players have absorbed the styles of 10 very different composers

There's nothing in the least laid-back about Jonathan Biss's tensely perfectionist survey of **Beethoven's** complete piano sonatas, where every note is tapped securely into place, leaving no room to doubt Biss's extremely precise musical intentions. I'm reminded of Shaw's quip to the young, note-perfect Heifetz about playing the odd wrong note so as not to incur the wrath of the gods. The first movement of Biss's *Hammerklavier* admits to a sense of joy and the *Adagio* responds with genuine sorrow; but elsewhere, although lost in boundless admiration for how accurate and minutely prepared his playing is, I longed for the odd patch of rude impatience or vulnerability, in a word humanness, the very epitome of what we call 'Beethovenian'.

By contrast, **Alexei Lubimov** on an 1828 Graf piano throws caution to the winds, especially in the first movement of Op 111 where, by comparison, Biss's

phrase punctuation sounds over-prepared. Lubimov is the ultimate recreative musician, an ideas man whose art as realised on various period instruments is celebrated on an impressive seven-disc set. There are six Beethoven sonatas (including the last three) and the Beethoven connection is extended with Charles Ives's kaleidoscopic *Concord Sonata*, which calls on the opening of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony as a recurrent leitmotif. The same CD includes Webern's *Variations* and Berg's *Sonata, Op 1*. There are also Schubert's two sets of *Impromptus*, a programme of 'Joyous and Sad' works for two pianos with Slava Poprugina (Stravinsky and Satie), Mozart piano duets (including the St Petersburg chamber composer Ivan Pratsch's duet version of the Second Piano Quartet in E flat, K493) and a solo-piano version of Haydn's *Seven Last Words*.

Staying among sacred climes, PHI has released a 50th-anniversary collection devoted to Collegium Vocale Gent under its founding music director **Philippe Herreweghe** consisting of various shorter choral works by Brahms, Victoria's *Officium defunctorum* of 1605, a programme of Bach cantatas and, most impressive of all, Beethoven's *Missa solemnis*, the *Credo* and *Agnus Dei* being highlights (the latter's second half is uncommonly broad, save for the faster battling interjections), and Dvořák's *Requiem*, where the *Agnus Dei* rises to a towering climax. Excellent sound, too. 6

## THE RECORDINGS

### Modern Times Edition Steffens

Capriccio © 10 + DVD C7337

### R Strauss Tone Poems Weigle

Oehms © 6 OCO33

### Beethoven Piano Sonatas Biss

Orchid © 9 ORC100117

### Beethoven, Ives, etc Pf Wks Lubimov

Alpha © 7 ALPHA570

### JS Bach, Beethoven, Dvořák etc Chor Wks

Herreweghe PHI © 6 LPH033





# REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings



## Bernstein and Ormandy Classics



Eugene Ormandy conducted some exemplary Philadelphia recordings

**A** most sensitive performance and the quality of the sound is very good indeed.' So wrote Roger Fiske (1/80) regarding **Michael Tilson Thomas's** 1978 CBS Masterworks recording of Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony with the English Chamber Orchestra, which was destined to be part of a complete cycle that Sony Classical has just reissued at super-budget price. Tilson Thomas is sensitive to the music's simple but subtle narrative, and the spatial separation of first and second violins pays off handsomely in the Country Folks' quick-fire fiddle exchanges. The same applies to the finale of the Seventh (and how elegant and impassioned Tilson Thomas's handling of the *Allegretto*). As to the *Pastoral's* 'very good sound', not on this latest incarnation I'm afraid, where the quiet opening sounds muted but grates uncomfortably as soon as the dynamic rises to *forte* and beyond. Tilson Thomas's San Francisco remakes of the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies are in general mellower and slightly broader – the finale of the Ninth especially – but where this earlier cycle scores is with the bite of the playing, especially from the strings, the smaller forces effectively enhanced by closer balancing. The Second Symphony's first movement is precisely played, the *Allegro con brio* especially impressive. A good set, this – bracing, intelligently thought through and generally well recorded – but not a great one.

At the opposite end of the interpretative spectrum comes **Leonard Bernstein's** incendiary Columbia set of the numbered Tchaikovsky symphonies, the chosen version of the Fourth from 1975 rather than the charismatic 1958 recording that I rated so highly in my *Gramophone* Collection (11/19). Still, this second shot also makes an impact, being in some respects even more thrilling than its predecessor, if not quite as deeply felt. The early symphonies have plenty of character, the First especially, while the Third's third-movement Elegy has warmth to spare. The Fifth and Sixth Symphonies are powerful, full-on affairs, the *Pathétique's* finale resembling recorded performances by Bernstein's one-time mentor Serge Koussevitzky, especially when we reach the candidly crying second subject. And there are the 'extras', top of the league, an utterly draining *Francesca da Rimini* which vies with the best for visceral excitement (ie that mushrooming tam-tam) and an equally electrifying *Romeo and Juliet* Fantasy Overture (1957). *Hamlet* isn't so impressive – here Bernstein sounds at pains to whip up excitement that doesn't come naturally to him (compare Stokowski with the same orchestra – Everest, 9/08) – but the *1812* and *Marche slave* both go well. The transfers are good, though the sound does occasionally glare somewhat.

Having treated us to comprehensive collections devoted to Bruno Walter, George Szell, John Barbirolli and Leonard Bernstein it was inevitable that Sony would settle next on **Eugene Ormandy**, a master conductor whose Philadelphia recordings of (for example) the Brahms symphonies are exemplary. On the evidence of two recent 'Sony Classical Masters' sets it looks as if Sony is poised to drip feed us – a complete Ormandy edition would call for pantechnicon-size packaging – initially not with Brahms but with Strauss and Shostakovich. What does surprise me is that rather than take advantage of the RCA/Sony (or what used to be Columbia) alliance

and treating us to Ormandy's complete run of Philadelphia Strauss/Shostakovich recordings for both labels, Sony has called it a day with the Columbia tapes alone. A pity, because it's always fun to make comparisons involving the same artists. The Strauss collection opens to a nicely observed and beautifully executed *Also sprach Zarathustra* before Ormandy and his players trace the heart-warming narrative of *Don Quixote* with cellist Lorne Munroe and viola player Carlton Cooley. *Ein Heldenleben* enjoys one of the best accounts of 'The Hero's Companion' I've ever heard thanks to the emotionally charged but never overstated violin-playing of Anshel Brusilow. The trumpets that signal 'The Hero at Battle' are perfectly balanced and as for the 'Battle' itself the bass drum in particular has great presence. Both the 'Works of Peace' and 'The Retirement from this World' are most movingly done. While *Till Eulenspiegel* is a little wanting in wit, *Don Juan* really raises the roof and *Tod und Verklärung's* contrasting sections dovetail beautifully. The Dance of the Seven Veils is predictably sumptuous, *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* (with cellist Samuel Mayes) is full of delicately drawn detail while the two concertante items – the *Burleske* and First Horn Concerto – are handsomely served by Rudolf Serkin and Mason Jones respectively.

In the case of Shostakovich, the absence of RCA material means that we don't have Ormandy's estimable versions of the last three symphonies. We do have a brilliantly played and remarkably comprehensive overview of the Fourth, where Ormandy captures every provocative gesture with intuitive understanding: try the first movement's wildly scampering string passage from 14'25" and the full-orchestral panic that follows – it's pretty impressive. The First Symphony and the First Cello Concerto with Rostropovich combine drama with pathos; and if Ormandy passes on a doggedly 'non-celebratory' interpretative option for the Fifth Symphony's finale and doesn't quite match the fever-pitch ferocity of Ančerl or Mravinsky in the Tenth's 'Stalin Scherzo', he nonetheless calls on enough rich ingredients to make his renditions well worth returning to.



## THE RECORDINGS



**Beethoven** Symphonies. Orch Wks **ECO / Tilson Thomas**  
Sony Classical (S) (6)  
19439 70396-2



**Tchaikovsky** Symphonies. Ovs **New York PO / Bernstein**  
Sony Classical (S) (5)  
19439 70965-2



**R Strauss** Orch Wks **Philadelphia Orch / Ormandy**  
Sony Classical (S) (4)  
19439 70953-2



**Shostakovich** Orch Wks **Philadelphia Orch / Ormandy**  
Sony Classical (S) (3)  
19439 70479-2

## Gulda in concertos

Three composers in particular appear to have fired the imagination of that most creative of Austrian pianists, Friedrich Gulda: Bach, Mozart and Beethoven. Gulda's account of *The Well-tempered Clavier* for Philips is at times virtually as individual as that of his near-namesake Glenn Gould, whereas with Beethoven and Mozart he was wont to court fewer extremes. A recent set devoted to Gulda concerto recordings made for radio between 1959 and 1962 opens to a broadly paced, darkly Beethovenian Stuttgart RSO account of Mozart's C minor Concerto, K491, under Joseph Keilberth, whose opening *tutti* sets the tragic scene in no uncertain terms, making way for Gulda's weighty first solo entry, which in turn heads towards a boldly stated cadenza, a nocturne-like *Larghetto* and a vivid theme-and-variations finale. For Beethoven's Fourth Concerto the ever-reliable Hans Müller-Kray takes the reins, engaging convincingly with Gulda, at least most of the time. There's much to admire and again the cadenza (Beethoven's own) is brilliantly played. The second disc, also featuring Müller-Kray, couples the trim classicism of Haydn's G major Concerto with Strauss's madcap *Burleske*, a work that Gulda famously recorded under Anthony Collins for Decca, both performances combining lyricism with a vivid sense of play. The disc ends with a dazzling performance of Debussy's 'Fireworks'. For the third CD we travel from Stuttgart to Baden-Baden and the South West German Radio Orchestra under Hans Rosbaud for typically considered accounts of further Mozart concertos, Nos 14 in E flat (a strong first-movement cadenza) and 23 in A, both

performances sincerely expressed, perfectly balanced and precisely executed. The transfers, taken from clean original mono tapes, are excellent.

## THE RECORDING



**Beethoven. Mozart, etc**  
Pf Concs **Gulda**  
SWR Classic (B) (3)  
SWR19088CD



## Carmen Dragon

When it comes to lighter fare or dramatically driven popular classics, Carmen Dragon's (mostly) 1950s sessions for Capitol are well-nigh unbeatable. Sound-wise, the recordings approximate the sort of 'sock it to me' impact that Capitol regularly achieved for key analogue soundtracks like *Carousel* or *Oklahoma!* and such jazz masters as Stan Kenton, whose extraordinary Wagner album also deserves a reissue. The playing is truly fabulous, whether in the Rachmaninov-like version of 'So in love' that sits in the context of an imaginative all-Cole Porter programme, Dragon's plush reworking of *Salut d'amour*, the earlier of two *Pomp & Circumstance* March No 1 recordings (truly marvellous), a searing Barber *Adagio* or an extended tone poem based on *The Volga Boatman* [sic]. Dragon expert Edward Johnson (to whom I am greatly indebted for key information) is pretty sure that all of Dragon's Capitol recordings, both mono and stereo, are included. The problem is that the lack of a booklet means there's no reliable way to check key facts, such as which orchestra is playing what. The orchestras themselves, probably involving substantially similar personnel, are the Hollywood Bowl Symphony and the Capitol Symphony. The exception is the version of the latter that was used for 1959 sessions at London's Abbey Road studios and is actually the RPO under the Capitol SO pseudonym. The RPO/Dragon legacy focuses on the albums 'Americana', 'Bless this House', 'Over the Waves' and a concert that includes bracing accounts of *Marche slave* and 'Autumn' from Glazunov's *The Seasons* ballet. Elsewhere unnamed soloists include the pianists Leonard Pennario (Addinsell, Wildman, Bath, etc) and Emanuel Bay (a Chopin programme with orchestra), and a whole host of eloquent string players (Israel Baker, Felix Slatkin, Eleanor Aller?) who to the best of my knowledge weren't credited on the original albums either. Dragon and his expert players deserve something better but, in the meantime, I can assure you that the vast majority of Scribendum's transfers

are excellent, whatever their sources (only a few tracks appear to be taken from vinyl pressings) and that the filmic vividness of these productions is quite unique.

## THE RECORDING



**The Art of Carmen Dragon**  
Scribendum (S) (17) SC820

## The magic of Rabin

Another Capitol signing was the prodigiously gifted violin virtuoso Michael Rabin, who in 1972, at the age of 35, tragically succumbed to a neurological condition. Although between them Warner and Testament have already released the bulk of Rabin's recorded legacy, a recent four-disc set on the Profil label offers an impressive overview of the violinist's playing style, as captured both live and in the studio. Probably the sensational highlight is Paganini's First Concerto with the Philharmonia under Lovro von Matačić, a powerfully athletic alternative to the teenage Menuhin's agile, sweet-centred 1934 recording under Monteux. Where Menuhin uses Sauret's first-movement cadenza, Rabin prefers Flesch's tougher-grained alternative. The collaborations with Adrian Boult are especially fine, Bruch's *Scottish Fantasy* both brilliant and flexible, with soloist, orchestra and conductor in total accord. The Tchaikovsky Concerto, again with the Philharmonia (under Alceo Galliera) compares with the best from the period and the Los Angeles world-premiere performance of Paul Creston's hyperactive Second Violin Concerto (1960) under Georg Solti defies belief with its confidence and stunning virtuosity. As to chamber music, Bach's C major Solo Sonata at times suggests the influence of Heifetz; and if Fauré's First Sonata and Beethoven's Eighth are rather spoilt by what sounds like crude 'electronic stereo', a workable partnership with pianist Lothar Broddack hints at the sort of sensitive duo-sonata player Rabin might have become had fate dealt with him more fairly. Other works programmed include concertos by Mozart (No 4), Glazunov and Wieniawski (No 1), plus various shorter pieces. The transfers are more than acceptable.

## THE RECORDING



**A Genius on the Violin Rabin**  
Profil (B) (4) PH20003



# Classics RECONSIDERED



**Mark Pullinger**  
and **Hugo Shirley**  
reappraise Abbado's  
1971 *Barbiere* recording  
with the LSO



## Rossini

*Il barbiere di Siviglia*

**Sols; Ambrosian Op Chor; LSO / Claudio Abbado**  
DG

This new set makes a suitable companion to DGG's *Cenerentola*. Like that recording it is closely connected with a stage performance. Abbado conducted *The Barber* at Salzburg in 1968 and 1969 with Prey, Alva, Montarsolo and Malagù in the cast. Later the staging was seen at La Scala, by which time Berganza had joined the team as Rosina and Enzo Dara had taken over from Corena as Bartolo. All the performances have been in Zedda's revised edition, which is based on the autograph, although it should be pointed out that the Decca set and also, I believe, the current Sadler's Wells production have already used reasonably authentic versions of the score, so too much should not be claimed for the new recording in that respect.

Besides, if a performance is claiming to be so authentic, it should be complete, and this one makes the traditional cuts in the last scene. Abbado conducts a spirited, vivid account of the score but a slightly poker-faced one. You need only turn to Gui to hear what Abbado lacks in making Rossini's orchestration smile, in giving just that additional lift to the rhythms. Abbado, make no mistake, yields to nobody in discipline, nuance or dynamic range – and the very clear, spacious DGG acoustic helps him in this respect – but I think there is more sheer exuberance, more high spirits in the score than he as yet finds there. Gui's *Barbiere*, with the old Beecham-RPO in ripping form, to my mind still outclasses all other performances before or since on disc. One of the tests of any *Barber* performance is 'Dunque io son' and the recitative leading into it. Here Figaro and Rosina must captivate one. Prey sounds

a little heavy, at least when set beside Bruscantini or Gobbi. Still he and Berganza will not disappoint those of us not beset with making odious comparisons. Their singing is fluent and enjoyable. Once Prey had got by a rather lumpy 'Largo al factotum', he sings with a good deal of verve and confidence, and his Italian is excellent. Dara is a rather subdued Bartolo by comparison with our own Ian Wallace or Decca's inimitable Corena. Nobody wants the part made too farcical but the older singers relish their words in a way Dara doesn't match. However, he has it over them in a bravura performance of 'A un dottor', the fast section of which is taken a fair old lick by Abbado. Choosing this new set, you will have a very musical, considered, and satisfying performance but not one that has the effect of opening a magnum of champagne – for that go to Gui. **Alan Blyth** (10/72)

**Mark Pullinger** 'Figaro qua, Figaro là, Figaro su, Figaro giù' – Rossini's *Barber of Seville* was everywhere on disc in the heyday of the studio opera recording industry. When I began collecting, this Claudio Abbado set, recorded in 1971, was considered one of the very best, so it's quite a surprise to read Alan Blyth's not entirely glowing reception in our illustrious pages! It's quite grouchy for AB, isn't it?

**Hugo Shirley** Indeed, and it's interesting that despite such a reception (in these pages, at any rate) it went on to achieve the status it did – at least in combination with the earlier *Cenerentola* recording that Blyth mentions. I have to say, though, returning to it after God knows how long, I find myself agreeing with many of his judgements. I reread Alberto Zedda's earnest, almost finger-wagging

booklet note, too, which underlines the musicological aims behind his then-new edition and this recording, apparently envisaged as something like an ideal realisation of it. Either way, you get the sense that, for Abbado, *opera buffa* is a serious business.

**MP** Very much so, which is odd, because Abbado was a man of the theatre. I do wonder if part of the problem was having the LSO on board, rather than an Italian pit band like Silvio Varviso's San Carlo orchestra – although if you turn to AB's favoured Vittorio Gui recording, that has the RPO. But listen to the pizzicato middle section of 'Una voce poco fa' or the *stretta* finale to Act 1 and there's a feeling that with Abbado the fun is being strictly rationed. Why didn't he record *Barbiere* and *Cenerentola* with his La Scala forces?

**HS** Good question – but do you really think it would have made any difference? I certainly can't imagine they'd have bettered the LSO in terms of crispness and precision. I get the sense that they're simply executing Abbado's vision of the score: cleaned up, beautifully engineered but more abstract than theatrical. One thing I'd say is that it's remarkable how fresh and polished the playing still sounds. What you really notice, though, is how much the singing of Rossini has developed – or at least changed – since.

**MP** Yes, although I think by the time of this recording things were already changing. The other day I listened to Giulietta Simionato (under Alberto Erede in 1956, for Decca), who was a fabulous dramatic mezzo, but she simply wouldn't be cast as Rosina these days. Teresa Berganza has a smaller, leaner sound and she can





Claudio Abbado's 1971 *Il barbiere di Siviglia* for DG remains an important marker in this opera's discography

negotiate the coloratura much more cleanly, barely clipping any fences. Both her arias are technically polished ... but do you get much sense of character? Her Rosina and her Angelina (*Cenerentola*) are pretty interchangeable.

**HS** Yes, you're right. And I waited in vain for the switch to *vipera*-mode halfway through 'Una voce poco fa'. Just think how any number of mezzos since Agnes Baltsa and Cecilia Bartoli have all the notes and agility, while also managing to bring real sassiness and fizz to the character.

**MP** Ah, Baltsa's Rosina is a wily minx and knows when to bare her teeth! Berganza is far too well behaved.

**HS** And with Luigi Alva's Count Almaviva you're made very aware of how we're spoilt for Rossini tenors these days. He sings pleasantly enough, but the timbre's kind of chewy, and it sounds like he's negotiating the role rather than relishing it. Blyth complains that the text performed isn't complete, but I was glad, if I'm honest, not to have to sit through his 'Cessa di più resistere'.

**MP** Alva certainly doesn't sound as fresh as he does in his earlier Almavivas (with Alceo Galliera in 1957, or Gui in 1962). 'Ecco, ridente in cielo' is a touch laboured, and you sense him clinging on to the handrails in the

rapid *fioritura*, where his tone becomes rather pinched. But his little serenade with the guitar has a certain charm. In terms of completeness of text, Abbado did include 'Cessa di più resistere' on his second recording (with an inferior cast), in 1992.

**HS** Ah yes, which included an early foray into baritone territory for a certain Señor Domingo ...

**MP** I have to admit I've got problems with Hermann Prey's Figaro. One gets the sense that he's trying really hard to be a bluff cove, but there's some ungainly stuff in there. AB is right about the 'lumpy' singing in 'Largo al factotum', and Prey struggles in the latter stages of 'Dunque io son'. Although he's not as overemphatic as his compatriot Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in Italian repertoire, it's still not pretty. How do you like his Figaro?

**HS** He's certainly not bad, and one can only imagine what a meal Fischer-Dieskau would have made of it. But think of all the other baritones around at the time who might have brought a greater sense of fluency, ease and sunniness. Was DG keen, I wonder, to have a name that would appeal to the German market?


**MP** I suppose it decided against going with Renato Capecchi (who sang Dandini on the Abbado *Cenerentola* sister release) because he'd sung Figaro on Bruno Bartoletti's

*Barbiere*, also on DG (1960). In this company, Prey is a bit of a fish out of water.

**HS** The colour of the voice, as Blyth notes, is a bit heavy; and, as you say, one in particular notices his laboured way with the patter – at the end of his 'Largo al factotum', for example. Compare that with Enzo Dara's brilliance as Bartolo. In fact, the Italians in the cast are those who really lift the performance for me. There's Dara, of course, but also Paolo Montarsolo as a beautifully impassive, not to mention superbly sung, Don Basilio. Incidentally, in 'La calunnia' you really do notice the virtues of Abbado's detailed approach; there are certainly places where there's something to be said for his 'straight man' direction.

**MP** Yes, it's with Dara that I really part company with AB. This was very early in his career (his first Bartolo wasn't until 1967, on stage), and he went on to become the reigning Rossini *buffo* for decades. His patter is even sharper than Fernando Corena's (some achievement!), and he does relish the text. I don't find this a subdued performance at all. I also like Montarsolo's poker-faced Don Basilio, although few can beat the sepulchral bass of Cesare Siepi (Erede), which is, consequently, very funny. In summary, is Abbado's *Barbiere* one that you'd pull down from the shelves very often?

**HS** It's undoubtedly an important recording, and I think it's fair to say that it had some of the cleansing effect on *Barbiere* performance (on disc, at least) which, in conjunction with his new edition, Zedda's essay suggested it would. But – though it's an admirable and in many ways impeccable achievement – it's not a version to love in the way of some others you've mentioned. The central three performances aren't as engaging as they could be, and ultimately it all just feels a bit too far from the theatre, a bit too intellectual. From your comments, I'm guessing you feel similarly ...

**MP** Ironically, I've more time for Abbado's *Cenerentola*, which smiles a little more. But you're right about the importance of this *Barbiere* as a transitional recording towards lighter, cleaner textures – a process that was to continue with Neville Marriner (Philips) and Riccardo Chailly (Sony). It's a shame that the decline in studio recordings (the last new studio *Barbiere* on CD was made in 1994) will probably deny the likes of Michele Mariotti the chance to set down an interpretation on disc. Now that could really have zinged! 



# Books



## Lindsay Kemp welcomes a masterly and long-awaited Bach sequel:

*'If Wolff's first book could be described in its simplest terms as "Bach in his world", his second is "Bach in eternity"'*



## Mike Ashman enjoys a biographer's further reflections on Berlioz:

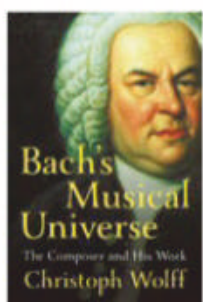
*'This is Cairns's fourth substantial book on Berlioz, and it is a cunningly prepared collection that serves several purposes at once'*

## Bach's Musical Universe

By Christoph Wolff

WW Norton, HB, 432pp, £30

ISBN 978-0-393-05071-4



A new Bach book by Christoph Wolff, Professor Emeritus at Harvard and a former director of the Leipzig Bach Archive, is an event worth waiting for – even for 20 years. In 2000 his biography *Johann Sebastian Bach: The Learned Musician* was a Pulitzer Prize finalist and effortlessly assumed the status of essential Bach literature; reviewing it in *Gramophone*, the late Malcolm Boyd (no mean writer on Bach himself – 8/00) hailed it as 'undoubtedly the most authoritative and up-to-date survey of the composer's life and works in English'. *The Learned Musician* brilliantly posited both a life for Bach and the role of his music in it, but in his preface Wolff let us know early on that he considered it not to be the whole story, and that 'a more detailed discussion of individual works' would follow as a separate study. Here now, at last, is that study.

*Bach's Musical Universe* is a more than worthy companion volume. For one thing, it should not be assumed to be a purely academic analysis of Bach's music. Detailed explication of the music, though authoritative, is never for its own sake, never outstays its welcome by straying into irrelevance, but is ever at the service of a greater ambition to examine Bach's musical imperatives. If Wolff's first book could be described in its simplest terms as 'Bach in his world', his second is 'Bach in eternity'. *Bach's Musical Universe* is nothing less than an attempt to enter the greatest of all musical minds.

That Bach was strongly motivated as a composer is obvious. Both the extent and extraordinary nature of his output tell of a creative artist with an obsession for exploring music to the limits. Such was recognised in his own time, as the famous

obituary by his son Carl Philipp Emanuel and pupil Johann Friedrich Agricola showed when it referred to 'the most hidden secrets of harmony'. Wolff's project is to focus on another of Bach's apparent fixations, that of organising his music into representative collections which, concisely but with maximum variety, sum up his own realisations of a particular genre's possibilities. Some, such as the four books of *Clavier-Übung* or *The Art of Fugue*, he published; others he didn't, though it is clear that the Cello Suites, the *Brandenburg Concertos* or *The Well-Tempered Clavier*, for instance, have similar 'opus-like' qualities. Wolff goes further however, and suggests that there is a similar function behind larger bodies of work such as the Leipzig cantata cycles or the short Masses. Even the Passions, and the *Christmas, Easter and Ascension* Oratorios are grouped here into 'a grand liturgical Messiah cycle'.

Wolff's thesis is that these 'benchmark collections' reveal what Bach himself thought really mattered in his music and that could stand as his legacy, and he argues it convincingly. He finds a handy guide in the worklist in the Obituary, which catalogues 15 categories of works along the lines of the above but consigns the remainder to a miscellaneous section consisting of 'a mass of other instrumental pieces of all kinds'. (Deliciously, he suggests the list might have been compiled by someone simply reading along the shelves of the deceased composer's music library.) And he keeps a sharp eye open for a telling organisational or compositional detail, be it something like the fact that the second Leipzig cantata cycle opens with a French overture or that the unfinished *Orgel-Büchlein* was written out in a booklet which had exactly the right number of blank pages needed for its completion. Bach didn't finish his project on that occasion but he usually did, and another key Wolff observation is that, having made his statement on a genre, he rarely returned to it.

The subject is absorbing, and remains so as each new chapter alights with satisfying

chronological coherence on a new Bach 'project'. Wolff frequently reminds us that for Bach, even in works that he presented as being educational, renewal of the soul and ability to touch the heart were also important objectives. And attending so closely here to the composer's work in the company of a scholar showing all the musical wisdom, musicological authority and literary clarity of his 80 years brings a similarly pleasurable benefit: a reminder of how in its perfection, complexity, questing reach and supremely touching beauty, Bach's work is rich and strange beyond anything else in the history of music.

Lindsay Kemp

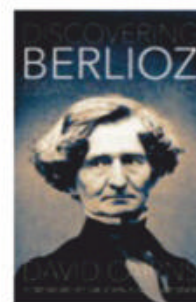
## Discovering Berlioz

Essays, Reviews, Talks

By David Cairns

Toccata Press, 400pp, HB, £39.50

ISBN 978-0-907-68958-4



Scholar, author, record company executive, conductor and critic

David Cairns has devoted much of his career to the uncovering of the life, achievements and reputation of Berlioz. His interest started in the 1950s, at which point in time many of the serious performances of that composer's music – and much of the more considered assessment of his work – had still been British-based. It was sparked not least by Rafael Kubelík's first-ever majorly complete performance of *Les Troyens* at Covent Garden (later issued on disc by Testament, 10/09, and a *Gramophone* Historic Archive Award-winner).

The present volume is Cairns's fourth substantial book on Berlioz and arrives in succession to a translation of the *Memoirs* and a two-volume biography. It is a cunningly prepared collection that serves several purposes at once. From the author's point of view it picks up (and often re-presents and extends) substantial





Aspects of the life, music and reception of Hector Berlioz are discussed by David Cairns

nuggets of his earlier writing and speaking on Berlioz, some for the Berlioz Society and its Bulletin. Little introductions along the book's course – which basically follows Berlioz's career chronologically – also provide a skeleton history of Cairns's work on the composer. (This must surely be the only scholarly monograph on a composer to include a photo of the author, aged three, with his first girlfriend.) And, while reissuing and polishing up much existing research, the contents also serve as a valuable prompt to the highlights and details of Berlioz's life.

Interest and diversity are maintained throughout. Things start well with the so-called 'Preamble' to the book already including a 20-page 'Autobiography/Biography' sketch of the complex relationship between the composer's life and work – as explored, for example, early on in his career (1829–30) in the *Symphonie fantastique*. Controversial or less discussed issues are not ignored. 'The Distant God' – a carefully chosen title – looks,

in the varying contexts of works from the 1837 Requiem to the 1854 *L'enfance du Christ*, at the ambiguities of Berlioz and 'established religion'. Cairns notes that 'he may even have a soft spot for certain aspects of it. Nonetheless he is pretty cynical on the subject, pretty dismissive.' 'Berlioz and Song' reminds us of 'the presence of solo song at the heart of the orchestral abundance of major works, beginning with the *Fantastique* (where the melody of his early setting of Florian's "Je vais donc quitter" finds its way into the symphony's opening evocation of "a young heart first tortured by a hopeless love")'. The family background is introduced, through his younger life at La Côte-Saint-André, his father Dr Louis and his sisters Adèle and Nancy. And the 'sheer inconvenience' (Cairns) of the early-1990s discovery of the 'lost' early *Messe solennelle* (1824–25) to a biographer whose narrative is already under way is feelingly and quite amusingly described in a chapter of its own.

The book continues with an effective mixture of the narrative and the symbolic. 'Shakespeare – Our Father' describes how the Bard is 'one of the main threads, perhaps the central thread, running through Berlioz's existence as an artist, from 1827, his 24th year, to the end – even, as I shall attempt to show, through his existence as a human being – uniting it, binding it, making sense of it'. He was to call *Les Troyens* a 'spectacle Virgilio-Shakespearean', Virgil Shakespeareanised. These two, together with Gluck and Beethoven, were, Cairns suggests, 'the four creative geniuses who have been the central, crucial presence in his life'. An explanation of how he came to Beethoven is the concern of the following chapter, 'The Mighty Bird'. This was an image coined by Berlioz while reviewing a rehearsal of one of the late quartets: 'one of those unearthly *Adagios* where Beethoven's spirit soars vast and solitary like the mighty bird above the snows of Chimborazo' (a volcano in Ecuador thought at the time to be the world's highest mountain).

Part 4 of the book, reaching the 1840s, includes strong essays on the *Grand Traité* and a lecture (from a conference held in Bayreuth) on the mostly favourable 19th-century German reactions to Berlioz's music and ideas. There is also full coverage of *La damnation de Faust* with a commented discography and, not incidentally, several collected and gratuitously bitchy anti-Berlioz insults from musicians who might have known better. Part 5 deals with Berlioz's often torn politics – 'The Reluctant Conservative' is the title of one transcribed lecture which, Cairns believes, 'sums up a highly complex situation as accurately as is possible'.

And thereafter, rather like this writer's own focus in his working life, much of the rest of the book is devoted to *Les Troyens*. It includes a reprise of Cairns's substantial and already much circulated essay on 'Les Troyens and the *Aeneid*', some memories of the 1957 London production, some debate about and with Colin Davis as conductor of the work (he was probably the score's most practised interpreter in the last part of his life) and a strangely short-sighted review of a Hamburg production of the opera by Götz Friedrich. Here every offended objection Cairns raises actually makes the staging seem more valuable.

But the book overall is crammed full of useful, relevant and readable insights. For readers both familiar and unfamiliar with the biographical and musical material that occupy Cairns's first three Berlioz volumes, not to mention complete beginners with this composer, this should be an essential purchase. **Mike Ashman**



# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

## Beethoven's Violin Concerto

**Charlotte Gardner** considers almost a century of recordings of the first great Romantic violin concerto

**M**any a beauty, but ... the continuation often seems completely disrupted, and ... the endless repetitions of a few common passages may easily become wearisome.'

Hardly the most glittering appraisal for a work which these days sits in the pantheon of violin repertoire greats. However, this was the verdict of Vienna's *Wiener Theater-Zeitung* on Beethoven's Violin Concerto following its December 1806 premiere by the Viennese violinist Franz Clement; and in light of what would have been heard, not an unreasonable one. For starters, the soloist's part did genuinely contain a fair number of dully repetitive sequences, especially in the first movement – something Beethoven himself acknowledged by making substantial revisions before publishing the final version in 1808.

It's also likely that the continuation *was* constantly interrupted, although this time not because of the quality of the writing. Not only was the concerto delivered so last-minute that Clement apparently performed it 'at sight and without previous rehearsal', but it also saw Beethoven throwing what would have felt like a structural and conceptual curveball into the concerto context of the time. The *Allegro ma non troppo* first movement is cast as a series of thematic episodes that only loosely follow the period's standard sonata form, with its inbuilt momentum through melodic and harmonic development. The *Larghetto* is written as a series of variations with little harmonic contrast. And the Rondo finale features yet more episodic writing. In other words, forward flow and overall cohesion don't happen by themselves, and certainly not from first recipients on an 11th-hour job.

Additionally, in an era during which soloists reigned supreme in the concerto hierarchy, these first performers had to get their heads around the orchestra suddenly being promoted to a symphonic

level of importance, even to the extent of initially being cast in the lead role. The violinist doesn't enter until three minutes in, and then with lines acting mostly as embellishments to the orchestra's argument. So the Rondo is cathartic not just for its tone but for the violinist at last jubilantly launching a movement and its principal theme.

There was also the left-field colouring of giving the work's very first notes and most prominent motif – those five crotchet beats – to the timpani of all instruments. Such genius required some acclimatisation.

### QUESTIONS OF INTERPRETATION

Tempo is perhaps the biggest question for performers: crucially, how to deal with the outer movements' episodes so that they don't feel bitty, including whether to markedly slow the tempo or merely change colour for the minor-tonality sections. Then, how to read the first movement's fast-but-not-too-fast *Allegro ma non troppo* marking, how slow to take the *Larghetto*, and what speed for the Rondo when the score carries no tempo indication at all. Beethoven was writing the concerto at the same time as his *Pastoral* Symphony, with its 6/8 peasants' dance; did he want a rustic flavour for the Rondo's 6/8 time signature?

For the soloist there's also the question of cadenzas. Beethoven didn't provide his own violin set, but over 60 have subsequently been written by the likes of Spohr, Saint-Saëns and Schnittke. Beethoven did, however, pen a highly inventive set for the piano transcription of the concerto for Muzio Clementi, published in 1807, complete with timpani accompaniment in the cadenza for the *Allegro ma non troppo*. What's interesting about the concerto's recorded history, though, is that violinists not writing their own cadenzas have largely stuck to just two. For decades it was Fritz Kreisler's brilliantly conceived Romantic creations that dominated; they remain the standard

traditional choice. Then, as historically informed performance hit the mainstream, so did versions derived from Beethoven's piano set.

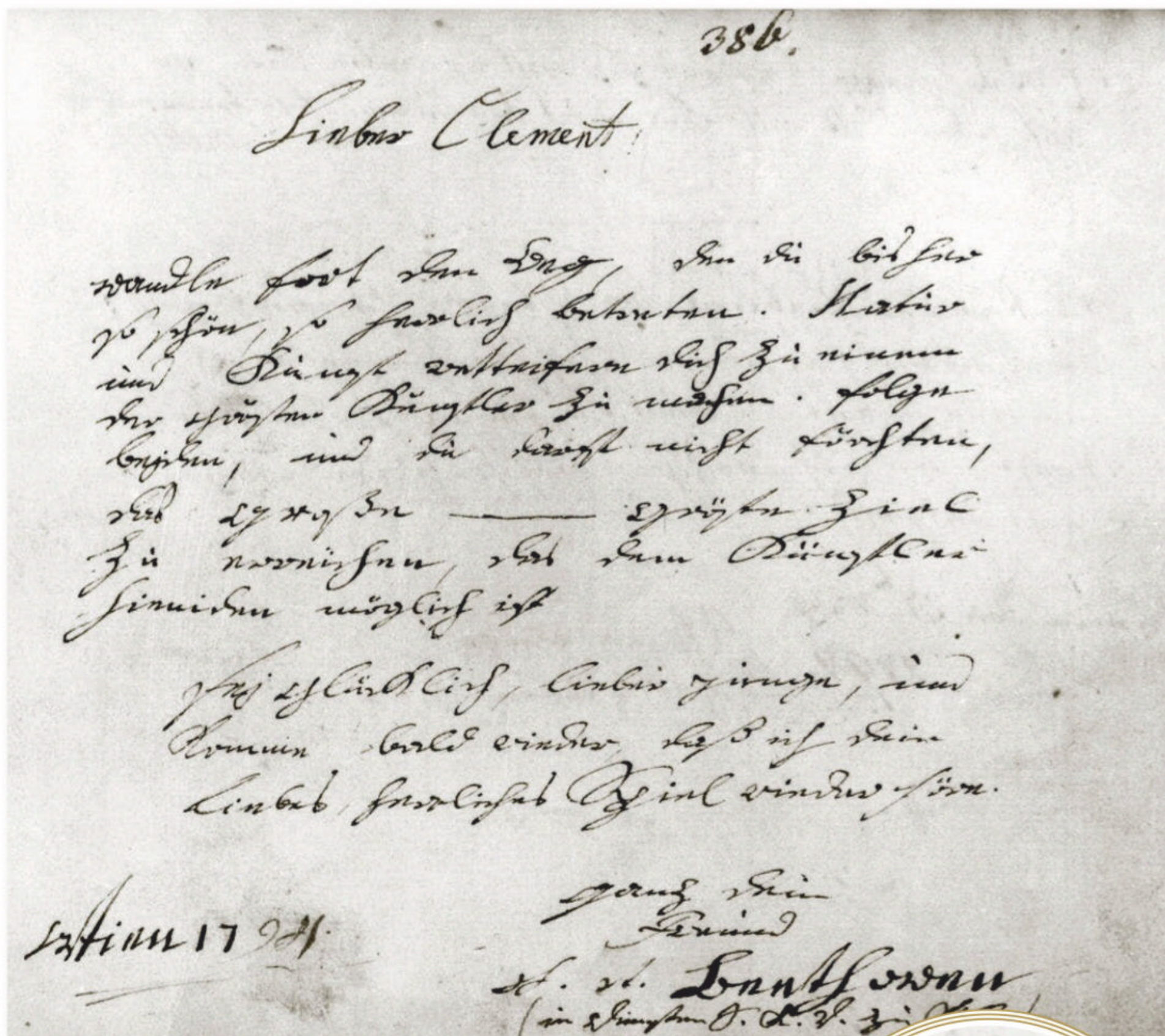
### GOLDEN-AGE BRIGADE

The available back catalogue begins in 1926, when **Fritz Kreisler** made the first electrical recording with the Berlin State Opera Orchestra under Leo Blech. Kreisler, playing his own cadenzas, employs plentiful but measured rubato, the period's more solid brand of portamento coming shaded with utter charm, and some ear-pricking but not overly eccentric phrasing. Blech's architecture also pleases, the little tugs before tipping into each new episode managing not to sound too sectional; and while the orchestra sounds a touch reduced, the engineering picks up Kreisler himself very satisfyingly.

**Bronisław Huberman**, playing Joseph Joachim's cadenzas, serves up a multicolour cracker on his remastered mono 1934 studio recording with George Szell and the VPO, mixing rhythmic precision with unbridled dashes, fiercely sudden hairpins, accents and sforzandos, and flirtatiously sliding portamentos. The *Larghetto* embellishments are delicious for the way they change tone like a seducer experimenting with different tactics. The orchestra equally sound fantastic, especially their Rondo – by turns a delicate and gutsy peasant dance taken at a dazzling speed, with bouncing viola barks.

**Joseph Szigeti** – rich in vibrato, luminous and confident in portamento – also used Joachim's cadenzas for his high-energy 1946 recording, with a correspondingly powerful, glowing and urgent New York PO under Bruno Walter. Points to admire include fantastic tonal matching between Szigeti and the violins (listen at 6'26" to the way the first violins come off the back of their shared A), but after a while it all begins to sound unrelentingly loud and proud from everyone.





Beethoven's handwritten dedication to Franz Clement (inset, as a child), who premiered the Violin Concerto

For greater dynamic range and a less exhausting listen, head to **Yehudi Menuhin**. Of his five readings dating between 1947 and 1971, the constants are the Kreisler cadenzas, his characteristic poeticism and equally characteristic slower-end tempos, which can slightly frustrate in the Rondo. A solid choice with great sound quality is the 1953 recording with Furtwängler, supported by a gloriously rich, rounded and polished Philharmonia, but a 1971 recording issued in 2003, leading his own Menuhin Festival Orchestra, has him playing with especial freedom and love.

The **Jascha Heifetz** choice is trickier. If you gravitate towards superior sound quality, then it's the remastered 1955 RCA reading with Charles Munch and a smartly crisp Boston SO. This boasts the fastest tempos of this Collection, making for a

marvellously lickety-split peasant romp of a Rondo, but also a first movement that can at times feel a little hurried. Inevitably the mono 1940 recording with Arturo Toscanini and the NBC SO is less immediate in its sound, but Toscanini is able to rein in some of the rushing and the orchestra is on as much fire as Heifetz himself. Their Rondo is an exhilarating tour de force.

Of **David Oistrakh's** various recordings, his personal favourite was the vividly captured 1959 taping featuring the Kreisler cadenzas with the French National Radio Orchestra under André Cluytens, and it's hard to argue with that. Outer-movement tempos are among the more leisurely but never drag, dynamics are faithfully realised, tempos shift subtly from one episode to the next





with unforced ebb and flow, Oistrakh himself has a tone to die for, with gentle rubato, and his sensitivities to the orchestra include being one of only a few whose sustained bar 416 trill disappears beneath them.

An ardently singing **Zino Francescatti** first recorded the concerto (with the Kreisler cadenzas) in 1950 with Ormandy and the Philadelphia Orchestra (available to stream from BNF Collection), then again in 1961 with Bruno Walter and the Columbia SO. The latter has better sound quality but there's a greater richness to everyone's sound in the 1950 mono version, together with a slightly more energetic Rondo. Be warned, though, that Francescatti's piercing tone, with strong vibrato, can sometimes feel a bit rough down low and shrill up high.

### KREISLER REIGNS SUPREME

The Kreisler cadenzas largely rule the roost as we move through the 1960s.

**Christian Ferras**, with his warm, silky legato elegance, tactile 'stringy' tone, rubato push and pull, tightly throbbing vibrato and distinctively slower tempos often sounds like the mating call of some exotic bird. If you want to luxuriate over that sumptuous sound over a non-eyebrow-raisingly slow set of tempos then head to his 1959 reading with Malcolm Sargent and a perky RPO (available on the Artemisia label). If you want to wallow in a truly time-standing-still *Larghetto*, there's the 1951 studio recording with the BPO under Karl Böhm (Audite, 2/12). His most satisfying recording overall, though, with a by turns tender and thrilling orchestra, is from 1967 with the Berliners again, under Karajan.

There's a good reason why the go-to **Itzhak Perlman** reading has long been the 1972 recording with Carlo Maria Giulini and the Philharmonia. Unfussy and sweet-toned Perlman's silkily precise cadenzas hold and excite the ear as



Shining-toned Schneiderhan: more about the composer than the player

entities in themselves, while being alive to their larger-scale capacity to shift the orchestral gear up or down, and the polished orchestra does a brilliant switch from weightily rich to feather-light for the Rondo. Still, the 1986 live recording with Daniel Barenboim and the BPO offers serious competition – equally perfect but less introspective from Perlman, and with a greater joyful pep you especially appreciate in their Rondo.

**Arthur Grumiaux** is his free, elegantly supple self in both his 1966 take with the Philharmonia under Alceo Galliera and with Colin Davis and the Concertgebouw in 1974 (Decca or Pentatone, 3/75). Indicative of his poised clarity are his *Larghetto* bar 75s, with their whistle-clean break between bottom G string and top D. Both sets of tempos also feel right but ultimately the Philharmonia is the keeper, Grumiaux on better form and the whole thing captured with more immediacy.

Lavishly elongated tempos are the headline for **Anne-Sophie Mutter**'s 1980 reading with Karajan and the BPO. While Karajan opens the first movement with momentum, Mutter's entry slows things right down, with it eventually riding home at a lengthy and slightly episodic 26'39" (Huberman's was 21'10"). Still, Mutter's velvety, chocolatey voluptuousness is to die for, the orchestra has a fabulous weighty oomph, expert shaping holds things taut

even through the whoppingly long 11'25" *Larghetto* (the shortest are Jansen and Mullova at 8'20") and Karajan's Rondo thoroughly picks up the pace – excepting the minor episode – to bring us to a thrilling conclusion. Certainly it tops Mutter's at times more delicate live recording with Kurt Masur and the New York PO (DG, 12/02), which sounds too indulgent in places.

There's an episodic air to the outer movements of both **Kyung Wha Chung**'s 1989 live recording with the LPO under

Klaus Tennstedt (Warner, 6/92) and her 1979 studio Decca stamping with Kirill Kondrashin and the VPO, the minor-key episodes representing a distinct pulling-on of the brakes. This undeniably produces some wonderful moments, though, especially in Vienna, and indeed it's theirs that comes out on top.

### LONE WOLVES

Those not using the Kreisler cadenzas across this period are often also striking in other ways. Take **Mischa Elman** in 1955 with a young Georg Solti and the LPO. He's been catching us off-guard long before erupting into the first of his striking self-penned creations, with the Rondo in particular a *pièce de résistance* of eccentricity: its opening theme's fourth and fifth quavers re-interpreted as lopsided semiquavers, then a schizophrenic cadenza with shades of *The Pink Panther* before drunkenly sliding portamentos carry us to the finish line. It's worth hearing for being bonkers.

**Nathan Milstein**'s own cadenzas in his urgently biting 1955 recording with an energetic Pittsburgh SO and William Steinberg are very satisfying, though, a Kreisler-esque beginning acting as the springboard into a dramatic creation high on sequences and lightning-speed passagework, and making ear-catching use of the movement's material. Milstein wows with his quicksilver pace, too, even if

### HISTORIC CHOICE

**Schneiderhan**; BPO / Jochum  
DG (M) 447 403-2GOR

The Beethoven cadenzas in a ravishingly toned reading in which everything feels right



from everyone, with gorgeous engineering and a radiant coupling of Mozart's Violin Concerto No 5 as the double icing on the cake.

### MODERN CLASSIC

**Jansen**; Deutsche Kammerphilh Bremen / P Järvi

Decca (E) 478 1530DH

A by turns noble, transcendental and



jubilant reading from Janine Jansen under Paavo Järvi, effortlessly blending the best of the past with the best of the present, with stunning Kreisler cadenzas.

### PERIOD CHOICE

**Mullova**; ORR / Gardiner

Archiv (S) (E) 483 7269

Viktoria Mullova and John Eliot Gardiner provide a sense of supreme architecture



and a performance brimming with vim, with a sparkingly gorgeous tonal palette featuring a brass section and bassoon-playing to die for.



overall things can get a bit shrieky to fully woo the ear.

**Wolfgang Schneiderhan**’s 1962 reading with the BPO and Eugen Jochum saw him become the first violinist to base cadenzas on those from Beethoven’s piano transcription. Beyond those watershed creations, there’s a palpable sense from shining-toned Schneiderhan that this is about Beethoven rather than about him, his phrases elegantly shaped with barely-there rubato, plus faithful dynamics and crisply even trilling, matched by joyfully committed playing from an especially lucid-textured orchestra. The *Larghetto* is exquisite; and while their classy Rondo is perhaps politer than will hit everyone’s buttons, it’s eminently satisfying.

Zippering to 2005, **Maxim Vengerov**’s cadenzas for his slenderly silver-toned Abbey Road recording with Mstislav Rostropovich and the LSO are an engrossing mix of clear references to the concerto’s material and newer-sounding rhapsodies. The reading’s defining feature, though, is its gargantuan 27’20" first movement – this Collection’s longest. Often sounding akin to a great sailing ship stuck in irons, it slows yet further at transitions. So while there’s nothing outlandish about the *Larghetto* or Rondo tempos, they’re too late to save the show.

PERIOD AWARENESS LIFTS OFF

The period-performance specialists began to get in on the Beethoven action in the 1990s, and for tasteful originality, elegant energy and concluding cathartic merriness head to **Stephanie Chase** with the Hanover Band under Roy Goodman in 1992. Orchestral joys are its transparent, bristling textures, with the engineering lavishing attention on some gorgeous bassoon solos, while Chase’s own cadenzas impress with their unflashy lyrical beauty, the first ending notably not with a trill but instead a moving silence, after which the orchestral pick-up happens with superglued chamber skill.

**Gidon Kremer**’s 1992 take, with Nikolaus Harnoncourt and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, takes up the Beethoven cadenzas but with the twist of Harnoncourt opening the first himself on fortepiano, Kremer providing comment. It’s striking, but at five minutes also protracted, capped off by a coda with not quite enough breathing-room, followed by a *Larghetto* feeling a bit too keen to get things done and dusted. Still, Kremer himself is delectable – achingly lovely gossamer high-register work, always with fabulous tone quality whether through his mellow lyricism or his biting flashes of fire.



Jansen: supreme poeticism and virtuoso fire

A rushed atmosphere is the issue with the entirety of **Thomas Zehetmair**’s 1997 reading with the Orchestra of the 18th Century under Frans Brüggen, which likewise draws on the Beethoven cadenzas. It’s a shame: Zehetmair is a showstopper in terms of the neat precision and the palette of colours and shading he brings to even the fastest passagework.

**Joshua Bell**’s period approach with Camerata Salzburg and Roger Norrington

in 2000 extends to writing his own lyrical cadenzas, with an unusually beautiful main Rondo one (he’s also gone period by providing the second, smaller one). Beyond these, Bell keeps us charmed with the detail of his colouring and articulation, and from everyone things are impeccably shaped and stylishly buoyant, tempos at the swifter period-band end but with breathing-room.

For a perfect blend of class, crackle and cohesion – with some fabulous first-movement brass and Rondo bassoon – head to **Viktoria Mullova**’s 2002 recording with John Eliot Gardiner and the ORR. Stand-out features include absorbing cadenzas by period keyboardist Ottavio Dantone and Mullova’s lines briefly incorporating elements of an earlier draft; but such originalities always feel born of forensic thought rather than a desire to be distinctive. The ‘peasantry’ Rondo’s combination of Mullova’s slender delicacy and rhythmic orchestral bang is glorious.

There’s even more original figuration in **Patricia Kopatchinskaja**’s 2008 recording with the Orchestre des Champs-Élysées under Philippe Herreweghe, at satisfying tempos with the Beethoven cadenzas.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

RECORDING DATE / ARTISTS		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1926	Kreisler; Berlin St Op Orch / L Blech	Naxos (S) 8 110909; EMI/Warner (S) (10) (D) 265042-2 (8/09)
1934	Huberman; VPO / Szell	Naxos (S) 8 110903 (8/36 <sup>R</sup> , 10/00); Warner Classics (B) 9029 58951-6 (7/17)
1940	Heifetz; NBC SO / Toscanini	Naxos (S) 8 110936 (1/41 <sup>R</sup> , 6/57 <sup>R</sup> , 11/00)
1946	Szigeti; New York PO / Walter	Sony Classical (M) (D) SMK64459 (7/50 <sup>R</sup> ); (S) (77 CDs) 19075 92324-2 (12/19)
1953	Menuhin; Philh Orch / Furtwängler	Warner Classics (M) 2564 60759-7; (S) (18) 2564 67770-5 (2/54 <sup>R</sup> , 4/16)
1955	Elman; LPO / Solti	Decca Eloquence (B) ELQ480 6595 (11/55 <sup>R</sup> )
1955	Heifetz; Boston SO / Munch	RCA (M) (D) 09026 68980-2 (9/57 <sup>R</sup> , 7/99)
1955	Milstein; Pittsburgh SO / Steinberg	EMI (S) (D) 567584-5
1959	Oistrakh; French Nat Rad Orch / Cluytens	Warner Classics (S) (3) 2564 61444-3; (S) (17) 214712-2 (5/60 <sup>R</sup> , 11/08)
1961	Francescatti; Columbia SO / Walter	Sony Classical (S) (7) 88875 12391-2 (6/62 <sup>R</sup> )
1962	Schneiderhan; BPO / Jochum	DG (M) 447 403-2GOR (11/62 <sup>R</sup> , 9/95)
1966	Grumiaux; New Philh Orch / Galliera	Philips Eloquence (B) ELQ476 8477 (6/67 <sup>R</sup> )
1967	Ferras; BPO / Karajan	DG (F) 437 644-2GGA (12/67 <sup>R</sup> )
1971	Menuhin; Menuhin Fest Orch	EMI/Warner Classics (M) (D) 562607-2 (10/03)
1972	Perlman; Philh Orch / Giulini	Warner Classics (M) 2564 61299-7
1979	Chung; VPO / Kondrashin	Decca (S) (D) 400 048-2DH (8/80 <sup>R</sup> , 3/83); (S) (2) 452 325-2DF2; (S) (3) 478 6721DC3
1980	Mutter; BPO / Karajan	DG (F) 413 818-2GH (5/85)
1986	Perlman; BPO / Barenboim	Warner Classics (M) 2564 61298-0 (11/89 <sup>R</sup> )
1992	Chase; Hanover Band / Goodman	Cala (F) CACD1013 (12/93)
1992	Kremer; COE / Harnoncourt	Warner Classics (S) (14) 2564 63779-2 (12/93 <sup>R</sup> )
1997	Zehetmair; Orch of the 18th Century / Brüggen	Decca (S) (7) 478 7436DC7 (4/99 <sup>R</sup> )
2000	Bell; Camerata Salzburg / Norrington	Sony Classical (M) SK89505 (8/02)
2002	Mullova; Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique / Gardiner	Archiv (S) (15) 483 7269 (9/03 <sup>R</sup> , 5/20)
2005	Vengerov; LSO / Rostropovich	Warner Classics (S) (3) 026477-2; (S) (20 CDs) 2564 63151-4 (11/05 <sup>R</sup> )
2007	Batiashvili; Deutsche Kammerphilh Bremen	Sony Classical (M) 88697 33400-2 (A/08)
2008	Kopatchinskaja; Orch des Champs-Élysées / Herreweghe	Naïve (F) V5174
2009	Jansen; Deutsche Kammerphilh Bremen / P Järvi	Decca (F) 478 1530DH (1/10)
2010	Faust; Orch Mozart / Abbado	Harmonia Mundi (F) HMC90 2105 (3/12)
2014	Gould; Sinfonietta Riga	Edition Classics (F) EDN1058 (7/15)
2016	Ehnes; RLPO / Manze	Onyx (F) ONYX4167 (11/17)
2018	Tetzlaff; Deutsches SO Berlin / Ticciati	Ondine (F) ODE1334-2 (10/19)
2019	Kavakos; Bavarian RSO	Sony Classical (B) (2) 19075 92988-2 (1/20)



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Isabelle Faust's 2010 reading with Orchestra Mozart and Claudio Abbado is one of radiant hope

Kopatchinskaja herself is a filigreed, spright-like fireball of energy; and while the degree of rubato and her sudden angry flyings at her violin won't be for everyone, ultimately these flirt but still skirt with all-out eccentricity, and her first-movement cadenza is glitteringly virtuoso. Herreweghe's most delicious touch is to take their racing Rondo's brief excursion to the minor (3'20") at full tilt while leaning hard into the front of its dotted minims, mimicking a grinding hurdy-gurdy.

### PAIRINGS REIMAGINED

Thus far, recordings have overwhelmingly paired the concerto either with more Beethoven – especially the Romances – or the Mendelssohn Concerto. So **Lisa Batiashvili** leading the Deutsche Kammerphilharmonie Bremen from the violin in 2007 packs her first punch for not opening with the headline Beethoven, but instead six folk-inspired *Miniatures* by her Georgian compatriot Sulkhan Tsintsadze, which sell the album by themselves with their joyous scurrings, mournful laments and ear-catching extended techniques. Her Beethoven then occupies a satisfying and tasteful middle ground in tempo and weight between period and symphony orchestra, Batiashvili unashamedly but not overly romantic, and the Kreisler cadenzas coming with wonderfully sculpted long lines and golden tone.

**Janine Jansen** pairs her 2009 reading with the same ensemble under Paavo Järvi with Britten's Violin Concerto, cast equally in D-tonality and opening with timpani (the Britten is with the LSO). This hugely satisfying reading holds to tradition in the sense of the Kreisler cadenzas but not with the swifter-end, period-band-like 8'20" length of its still spacious-

sounding *Larghetto*. Jansen delivers all her characteristic serene poeticism and virtuoso fire, everything beautifully shaped and coloured, and the orchestra likewise satisfy on every level, with their combination of weight and spring producing one of the most cathartic Rondos.

The Beethoven sits second on **Isabelle Faust's** 2010 reading with Orchestra Mozart and Claudio Abbado (with Beethoven's cadenzas), emerging as the radiant hope after the Berg Violin Concerto has carried us from pain to acceptance. Beethoven-wise, tempos feel right, transitions organically wax and wane and the orchestra is lucid, polished and texturally characterful. Faust herself, on a gut-strung violin with sparing vibrato, serves up one of the widest palettes of colour, shading, articulation and mood. Add a properly transcendent *Larghetto* and one of the fastest, merriest and most pastoral Rondos on the block and it narrowly pips her strong offering with the Prague Philharmonia under Jiří Bělohlávek (Harmonia Mundi, 11/07).

Mellow-toned **Thomas Gould** alights upon the concerto's pastoral element for his 2014 live recording with Sinfonietta Riga, following it and its Beethoven cadenzas with an exquisitely simple *The Lark Ascending*. This is one of the more tenderly introspective first movements, to the extent that its cadenza is almost unrecognisable as the same played by Kopatchinskaja, but the finesse he brings to the crisply graceful Rondo cadenza's virtuosities actually stops you more in your tracks than hers. There's also a lovely chamber feel to the *Larghetto*, taken at a more old-school 10'13".

**James Ehnes** in 2016 with the RPO also looks distinctly old-school at first glance, using the Kreisler cadenzas and pairing

with the Romances. However, there's also the unusual choice of Schubert's Rondo in A, plus period supremo Andrew Manze on the conductor ticket. Consequently, this reading combines the depth, punch and sheen of a modern orchestra with more traditionally leisurely tempos, with acute period awareness full of airy transparency. Ehnes combines Romantic portamentos with clean-toned trilling, his articulation a constantly developing story.

**Christian Tetzlaff** has recorded the concerto three times, always with the Beethoven cadenzas, but the definitive version is his live 2018 take with Robin Ticciati and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. Like Jansen's it is a D-tonality affair, a feisty Sibelius Concerto its partner. Feisty is equally the word for Tetzlaff's exuberant Beethoven. Take the force with which he punches out his initial entry's sforzandos – his slightly untamed accents and metre won't be to everyone's taste. There's sweetness and polish, though, and palpable chamber awareness of the fabulous-sounding orchestra, from whose scoring Ticciati teases out multiple details.

Finally, **Leonidas Kavakos** serves up Beethoven-themed imaginativeness in 2019, leading the Bavarian RSO from the violin with the Beethoven cadenzas, a warmly vibrant Septet and five folk variations with pianist Enrico Pace. The concerto's outer movements have pace overall, despite being respectively a magisterial 27'27" and a stately 10'28" (in comparison to Francescatti's 7'31"), but at certain junctures the brakes feel overly pulled. With the lengthy *Larghetto*, time standing still takes on a more literal meaning. Likewise, while Kavakos serves up ravishing tone and electrifying cadenzas, his accents and rubatos sometimes feel a little quirky or indulgent.

As to which recording comes out on top, while there are some worthy contenders, it's Faust's 2010 reading that clinches things. Its right-feeling tempos, wide colouristic palette and all-round emotional vim combine with the fact that it sits within the most thoughtful, affective and effective overall programme, to make it *the* version to own. **G**

### TOP CHOICE

**Faust:** Orch Mozart / Abbado  
Harmonia Mundi © HMC90 2105

Joyous, natural and supremely intelligent,



and with the coupling of the Berg Violin Concerto creating a disc-long emotional journey that transcends mere complementary partnering.



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THIS MONTH A sleek network amplifier with performance beyond its size, a dedicated headphone amp, and the current challenges faced by the hi-fi industry.

**Andrew Everard, Audio Editor**

## JULY TEST DISCS



A beautifully balanced recording by Véronique Gens, with a warm, lustrous balance showcasing the performances in 96kHz/24-bit.



Crisp, tight and atmospheric, this set of Haydn and Mozart piano sonatas really shows off the detail available in either DXD or DSD.

## Solutions for better music – wherever you are

From wireless speakers to ways to improve your network, here's how to make the most of your system



**D**escribed as ‘A Powerful and Poetic Home Speaker’, the latest model from Bang & Olufsen is designed to fit in with a wide range of interior styles without compromising on sound quality. The Beosound Balance **1**, which stands just under 38cm tall, is launched in a mixture of natural oak wood and a knitted textile cover, with other colourways to follow, and uses light-through aluminium on top of the speaker to provide touch control. Reach out to the speaker and the collar lights up, allowing the user to swipe round to turn the volume up or down, or touch symbols to activate various functions. Drawing on the technology of the acoustic lenses in the company's flagship Beolab 18 and 50 speakers, the Beosound Balance uses an array of seven drivers, with opposing woofers to deliver solid bass without neighbour-worrying vibrations, and can be switched from omnidirectional dispersion to a more focused pattern.

Work involved in developing the Beolab 90, with its beam control and room compensation technology, enabled designers to build room measurement into the new model, allowing it to optimise its sound to the space in which it's placed. Compatible with Google Chromecast, Apple Airplay2 and Spotify Connect, the speaker can also be voice-controlled using Amazon Alexa or Google Assistant. It sells for £1750.

Tackling both traditional hi-fi and the world of network audio, accessory specialist

Russ Andrews has launched two new products designed to deliver enhanced performance. Its RCA phono-to-DIN adaptors **2** are designed to help connect standard interconnect cables to Naim products, as well as older models using DIN input sockets. Wired to suit 180° five-pin DIN sockets, the adaptors are 13.5cm long and available in a choice of two versions, using cabling from long-term Russ Andrews partner Kimber Kable: the £75 RCA/DIN Cu uses Kimber PBJ copper wiring and UltraPlate phono sockets, with the braided outer shield found on all Kimber Kable products to reject interference, while the £149 RCA/DIN Ag is wired with Kimber's pure silver KCAG cable.

Also new from Russ Andrews is an ‘audiophile’ data switch for Ethernet networking **3**, following a trend already being followed by music library manufacturer Melco and The Chord Company's revived English Electric brand. Based on the belief that standard network switches use inexpensive components designed for IT applications, the £989 Russ Andrews Network Switch uses a custom-built Trichord Clock to control the flow of data, with internal wiring from Kimber Kable and the company's favoured Panasonic capacitors. It has eight damped and shielded RJ45 Gigabit Ethernet ports and is powered from an offboard power supply unit in a box to match the main switch, the two being connected by a 0.3m lead made from Kimber PBJ cable

with locking plugs at each end. The PSU actually supplies two separate feeds: one is dedicated to the Trichord Clock, while the other powers the actual switching.

Linn's LP12 turntable is getting close to its 50th anniversary, having been launched in 1972, but the company keeps on improving and refining the design. The latest changes address one of the fundamentals of the record player – the bearing on which the platter spins – and also offers a new service allowing buyers unprecedented opportunities for personalisation. The new Karousel **4** bearing is the first upgrade in this area for 27 years and is said to have been made possible by new materials science and machining capabilities. Improved tolerances of the bearing liners and a carbon coating on the thrust pad reduce friction, improving the ‘noise floor’ of the turntable while increasing the stability of the whole assembly and promising longer life. In addition, the revised design allows the bearing to be removed without complete disassembly of the turntable and serviced in situ. The Karousel bearing kit, which also includes a new inner platter and all fixings, is £750.

Buyers of new Linn LP12 turntables can now opt to have the product finished in a wide range of high gloss colours, which are also available for the company's speakers. The service costs £330 and, for a further £330, the turntable can also be etched with a monogram of up to four letters. **G**



## ● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

# Denon PMA-150H

A sleek outer shell conceals a compact amplifier with wide-ranging capability, including network and online streaming and multiroom audio features

Denon's Design Series is now well established: having launched with just a single amplifier and a matching CD player, it has expanded to fill a significant place in the company's line-up. If you want to buy 'proper' separates hi-fi but don't want the convention of full-size components, this range's compact dimensions and sharp looks are designed to appeal in visual terms without compromising on sonic performance. That makes them useful not only for those of us with the luxury of setting up a second-room system, be it in a study or bedroom or wherever, but also those looking for a high standard of sound reproduction wherever space is tight.

Described by the company as 'Real Hi-Fi for Today's Lifestyles', the Design Series line-up currently runs to six models: two CD players and a quartet of amplifiers and receivers. It starts with the PMA-30, which can be found for as little as £199, and tops out with the latest arrival, the PMA-150H we have here, at £1099. All the models share the now-familiar styling, with silver aluminium top and base plates sandwiching a main body clad in a mixture of gloss and matt black, complete with a crisp white-on-black OLED read-out. While the entry-level amps are truly tiny at just 20cm wide – and can even be used on end to take up even less shelf-space, their displays reorientating to suit use in 'portrait' rather than 'landscape' mode – even the PMA-150H is hardly huge at 28cm wide and just over 10cm tall. A matching CD player, the DCD-100, is also available,



### DENON PMA-150H

**Denon** PM-150H

**Type** Network amplifier

**Price** £1099

**Analogue inputs** Two line

**Digital inputs** USB-Type B, USB-Type A, two optical, coaxial, Bluetooth

**Outputs** One pair of speakers, subwoofer, headphones

**Networking** Ethernet, Wi-Fi

**Streaming/multiroom** UPnP streaming from local sources, Apple Airplay, online services including Deezer, Amazon Music, Spotify, Tidal, TuneIn internet radio, HEOS multiroom

**Control** Remote handset, HEOS app, Alexa/Google Assistant voice

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset, Wi-Fi/Bluetooth/FM/DAB antennae

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 28x10.4x33.7cm

**www.denon.com/en-gb**

sharing the amplifier's dimensions: it lists at £519 but, as with all these mainstream Denon models, can be found with healthy discounts.

Speaking of price, the £1099 tag on the PMA-150H may seem somewhat ambitious for what is seemingly a 'lifestyle' component of the kind often overlooked by those

who consider themselves to be serious audiophiles. After all, under £500 (after a healthy discount) will buy you Denon's DRA-100, which appears to offer similar facilities. However, all these assumptions aren't quite borne out in use. The new arrival may be comprehensively equipped within its compact shell but this is very much real hi-fi made stylish, and capable of very high levels of performance, whether from conventional sources or network and online services.

As well as a direct asynchronous USB connection, enabling it to accept audio from a home computer at up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD128, the Denon also has conventional digital inputs on two optical sockets and one coaxial, capable of handling content at up to 192kHz/24-bit, plus two line analogue ins and a built-in DAB+/FM radio tuner. There's also a USB Type A socket to which storage devices can be attached for direct playback of music stored on them.

One of the optical inputs is designated for use with a TV, enabling sound to be fed out and through a pair of speakers to enhance viewing. The ability to power up from standby when a signal is sensed on that input, plus infrared learning to allow it be controlled by the TV handset's

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The Denon is an excellent 'just add speakers' system. Here are some ideas for making the most of it ...

### FOCAL COMPACT CHORA 806

A good pair of standmount speakers, such as Focal's compact Chora 806 model, will bring out the best in the PMA-150H.



### DENON HOME 100 SPEAKERS

Start expanding into a multiroom system with the addition of one or more Denon Home speakers, such as the little Home 100.



volume up/down commands, enhances that integration. Network connectivity is via either wired Ethernet or Wi-Fi, the latter using a stub antenna supplied to bolt on to a terminal on the rear panel, this also doubling for Bluetooth streaming direct from phones, tablets and computers. The Bluetooth section can be turned off when not in use, minimising any potential interference.

**The PMA-150H will confound naysayers with a sound full of detail and air, underpinned by a solid, confident bass**

New for this generation of the Design Series is the integration of the Denon-developed HEOS multiroom audio system, now rolled out across a wide range of the brand's products and those of stablemate Marantz. This allows music to be played from local storage, either on a computer on the same network or a dedicated network-attached storage unit, all under the control of the HEOS app for Android or iOS. It also gives access to a wide range of online services, including Amazon Music, Spotify, Tidal and TuneIn internet radio, adds Apple AirPlay compatibility and allows music to be played in multiple zones with the addition of extra HEOS and Denon Home speakers, plus other HEOS-equipped products. It's a simple, seamless system, in which it's easy to add, group and control multiple zones, and it brings the ability for the whole set-up to be controlled by simple voice commands using Amazon Alexa and Google Assistant: once you have designated zones in the relevant app, you can just say 'Alexa, play music X in zone Y' and it will happen. Well, usually ...

## PERFORMANCE

Aside from all that flexibility, the PMA-150H is built to sound good, too. It uses the company's tried-and-tested Advanced AL32 Processing Plus, which extrapolates extra data points from the incoming stream to give a sound at once smoother and more detailed. This feeds its output to the latest generation of Direct Digital Feedback Amplification, designed to keep analogue noise away from

its output. The power-amplifier section delivers 70W per channel into a 4-ohm load or 35Wpc into 8 ohms, which will be more than sufficient for the kind of relatively high-efficiency bookshelf and compact floorstanding speakers with which the Denon is likely to be used. There's also a dedicated headphone amplifier to feed the front-panel 6.3mm socket, complete with three-position switching to match headphones of high, medium or low impedance, while a rear-panel output can be used to feed an active subwoofer.

Whether used in full HEOS-capable mode under app control or as a simple amplifier via the remote handset supplied, the PMA-150H will confound the naysayers with a sound full of detail and air, underpinned by a solid, confident bass. Used with a pair of suitably priced speakers – in this case Focal's excellent Chora 806 standmounters, the subject of a future review – it delivers a sprightly, well-weighted rendition of Anthony Bonamici's recording of Haydn's Piano Sonata in A (ReachSound.Art), combining realistic instrumental scale with fine microdynamics, such that every note is struck cleanly and decays realistically.

Meanwhile, with the Gothenburg Symphony/Rouvali recording of Sibelius's Second Symphony (Alpha, 4/20), that same delicacy of touch, allied to slam when required, is much in evidence, even with the Denon driving a much more demanding speaker load in the form of Neat's Iota Xplorer compact floorstanders. The openness and bass weight of these speakers are well served by the little Denon amp; and even though I suspect few users would consider partnering an amp at this level with £3500-a-pair speakers – I usually drive them with altogether more heavyweight Naim amplification – that it powers them to such good effect is testament to the solidity of the design here.

But then that's the strength of the PMA-150H. I daresay one could buy something of similar capability in a more conventional form for less, either in the form of an amplifier or a receiver, but the ability to deliver so much in so compact a form is likely to win this slick little package many admirers. **G**

## Or you could try ...

**While the PMA-150H is at the forefront of a new generation of simple music streaming systems and has the undoubted appeal of that HEOS integration to let you set up no-fuss multiroom set-ups, it's not without rivals.**

### Arcam Solo Uno

Just about as simple as they come is the ultra-compact Arcam Solo Uno, the latest in a long line of all-in-one systems from the British-based brand. Used with a pair of speakers and the company's Music Life app, it will play from network sources and online services, and also has AirPlay, Bluetooth and GoogleCast wireless connectivity. Find out more at [arcam.co.uk](http://arcam.co.uk).



### Marantz NR1200

Marantz has taken the slimline style of its entry-level AV receivers and turned it into a stereo-only network-connected unit, the NR1200, complete with local and online services, Apple AirPlay and Bluetooth, HEOS multiroom and even HDMI inputs to connect your TV sound. There's even a phono stage for a turntable, to complete the all-round appeal. More details at [marantz.co.uk](http://marantz.co.uk).



### Cyrus OneCAST

The latest version of the revived Cyrus One range of shoebox-shaped integrated amplifiers comes bang up to date. The Cyrus OneCAST allows you to stream your own music collection as well as Apple Music, Deezer, Qobuz, Spotify, Tidal and more straight from your phone, as simply as sending music to a wireless speaker. It even comes complete with Apple, Alexa and Google voice-control compatibility, as you can find out at [cyrusaudio.com](http://cyrusaudio.com).





## ● REVIEW NOVAFIDELITY HA500H

# Something special for the ears

At its heart this is a high-quality headphone amplifier for the 'head-fi' enthusiast – but that's only part of the story ...

Recent years have seen an explosion in the range of headphones on the market, from in-ear buds so inexpensive they're almost disposable to models costing several thousand pounds, as manufacturers of electronics and speakers have moved into the arena. And with the rise of the high-end headphone has come greater prominence for dedicated headphone amplifiers, from little pocket devices designed to improve on the output from phones and the like to very serious desktop units combining digital-to-analogue conversion plus amplification with enough power to drive some of the trickier headphone loads out there, plus niceties such as balanced working for those headphones offering this kind of design.

Not all headphones are created equal, and some can put quite a strain on the ultra-miniaturised amplification found in portable devices, not to mention challenging those hi-fi amplifiers on which the headphone output can often seem to have been an afterthought. Things have got better of late, with manufacturers fitting dedicated headphone sections in their amps, but few are as effective as a purpose-built headphone amplifier – and that's exactly what the Novafidelity HA500H is.

Selling for a not inconsiderable £2099, this unit – from a company until now best-known for its CD ripper/servers – is described as a 'dedicated hybrid headphone amplifier'. But though it combines the functions of digital-to-analogue converter, headphone amplifier and pre-amplifier, that isn't quite what the 'hybrid' tag is all about: rather it covers the fact that this unit has both ECC82 valve and solid-state pre-amplifier output stages, between which the user can switch at will.

There's no suggestion that one kind of output is better than the other. Instead, either can be selected with the push of a front-panel button, according to taste and the particular recording being played. Indeed, in spending time with the Novafidelity I found that neither output selection had an overt character of its own; some music simply seemed better with one or the other options selected, in the same way that switching between the three digital filter settings – 'Fast Roll Off', 'Slow Roll Off' and 'Minimum Phase' – brought marginal changes to the sound.

The HA500H offers a comprehensive suite of inputs. As well as asynchronous USB, HDMI/I2S and optical/coaxial/AES/EBU digital inputs, it also has both balanced and unbalanced analogue ins and Bluetooth. On the output side, it complements its front-panel headphone sockets – 6.3mm for unbalanced and a four-pin XLR for balanced – with balanced and unbalanced analogue outputs to the rear. These can be used at fixed level, to connect the unit to the input on a conventional amplifier, or with variable output to feed into a power amplifier or active speakers.

The Novafidelity is a very long way from the DAC/amps you'll find in your computer or smartphone

Selecting those settings is just part of a comprehensive menu of options accessible via the front panel or the supplied remote handset; some are important, others rather more trivial. You can, for example, set the front-panel display to show bar meters of output power or virtual swing-needle VU meters, call up a choice of 17 settings of equalisation for Bluetooth sources (and one customisable), and even change the colour of the LED illumination of the pre-amp output tubes. Whether you view any of those as must-haves or see them as gimmicks is very much a matter of taste. I think I'm in the latter camp.

### PERFORMANCE

The HA500H uses dual ESS Sabre32 ES9018K2M DACs, one for each channel, enabling it to handle files at up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256 via its HDMI/I2S and USB-B inputs, and 192kHz/24-bit on the other digital ins, with MQA decoding also available. Elsewhere, the design uses dual power supplies – one switched mode and one toroidal transformer, a dedicated microcontroller for USB DAC functions, and isolated analogue and digital circuitry. It's a very long way from the DAC/amps you'll find in your computer or smartphone!

All that engineering is borne out in the sound it delivers, whether used as a headphone amplifier, a pre-amp or just a fixed-level DAC into a suitable amplifier.



### NOVAFIDELITY HA500H

**Type** DAC/headphone amplifier/pre-amp

**Price** £2099

**Digital inputs** USB-B, I2S/HDMI, optical, coaxial, AES/EBU

**Analogue inputs** RCA/balanced XLR

**Analogue outputs** 6.3mm/balanced XLR headphones; RCA/balanced XLR line/variable

**File formats** 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256 via USB-B and I2S; 192kHz/24-bit on other inputs

**Maximum rated headphone output**

**power** 485mW/ch balanced, 125mW/ch unbalanced into 600 ohms; 1100mW/ch into 16 ohms (unbalanced only)

**Maximum line/variable output power**

(solid state) 8Vrms balanced, 4Vrms unbalanced

**Accessories supplied** Bluetooth antenna, remote handset

**Dimensions** (WxHxD) 27x9x33.3cm

**cocktailaudio.com**

UK distributor **scvdistribution.co.uk**

I tried it with a range of headphones including the Bowers & Wilkins P9 Signature, Focal's Spirit Pro and Clear models, and – to hear what the HA500H could do in balanced mode – a pair of Oppo's late lamented PM-1 planar magnetic 'phones, and in each case the overarching impression was of effortless power and control, making the most of the sound of each design. That ability is best heard in the airiness and ease of the sound, whether with the closed-back P9s or the open-backed Oppos, making headphone listening the delight it should be. And there's so much clean power on offer I found myself exercising restraint with the Novafidelity's volume control – at least after the first orchestral crescendo had me grabbing for it to turn the level down!

But that's not something for which one can blame this amplifier. Its remarkable dynamic ability is symptomatic of a sound crammed with detail and expression but with a neutrality and natural balance that makes it highly addictive. True, the price puts it at level where it's probably only justifiable by those for whom headphone listening is the norm, not an occasional choice, but those who do buy it will be getting something very special. **G**



## ● ESSAY

# What will be the 'new normal' for the hi-fi industry?

We've all had more time of late to enjoy our music systems but it remains to be seen what will become of the companies that manufacture them, says Andrew Everard

There are more than enough distractions in the daily business of writing about hi-fi – and I don't just mean the obvious one of great music reproduced well catching and holding the attention. As I write this in mid-May, I'm being annoyed by mobile phone alerts reminding me to check in for a flight – one cancelled by the airline long ago, and booked to take me to one of the world's major hi-fi shows, also called off some time back. Or, in the euphemistic language of these times, postponed to the dates of next year's show.

It's happened a lot. In fact, the daily email read is not so much a matter of finding out what's new but looking to see which domino will be the next to fall. As the year ticks on, it's marked by the extension of the forward view from the summer into the autumn, as organisers of events either find they can no longer lose their nerve, or more to the point grasp the nettle of reality and cut their losses. An email I received today announcing a venue available for Christmas bookings said 'Now available (hopefully): all deposits fully refundable up to seven days before booked date'. That doesn't bode well.

With most of the year's major hi-fi events now cancelled or at least looking very shaky, it's hardly surprising that there have been very few new product announcements of late. At the time of writing, many retailers are closed and manufacturers either at a halt or just ticking over. I know of several major brands whose new product launch plans were built around the annual High End show in Munich – and I am sure there were many more, given the usual barrage of press events the opening day of that event usually includes – and all of those have gone very quiet of late.

What's more, given the long lead-times to which R&D and manufacturing work, it's likely the long-term effects of what we have learnt to call 'the current situation' will be felt for a good while to come. And that's without the side effects one doesn't even consider when buying a new piece of hi-fi equipment. For example, I recently heard of one manufacturer making product in the UK with no problems continuing



Precision engineering: handcrafting tonearms on the Jelco 'production line' in Japan

to produce its range, but with all assembly at a halt because it is unable to source the packaging in which its output is shipped out to retail and thence to buyers.

*I get the impression that most of the hi-fi industry is currently holding its breath and hoping for the best*


Another change – and one against which the hi-fi industry as a whole has fought for as many years as I can remember – is the increased prominence of mail order, or at least direct delivery from manufacturer/distributor to consumer. Despite all the long-running belief in the importance of demonstration and service, it's hardly a great secret that some companies have been ramping up their direct sales in order to enhance the margin on their sales, rather than having to share it with those further down the chain (a subject I have covered in these pages on previous occasions). Now I am increasingly seeing the mention of prices 'including delivery', and the online presence of those retailers able to support such shopping being ramped up. Readers in the UK will be familiar with one particular retailer whose pitch has recently been based around its ability to deliver 'tech', as it calls it, 'by 5pm next day', and even out here in the sticks, I find I could have the TV of my choice at my front door within 48 hours for a nominal charge.

Of course, the old belief in the hi-fi/AV world is that buyers want to look, touch and listen before buying. I certainly wouldn't invest a large sum in a hi-fi component without auditioning, but a friend in another product arena formerly built around the ability of customers to examine and select goods before handing over their money has found her mail-order business rocketing of late in response to offering services including live shopping via video conferencing.

Of course, that's not exactly practical for hi-fi comparisons, but it does show how things are changing.

I get the impression that most of the hi-fi industry is currently holding its breath and hoping for the best, but at the time of writing news has come of what I think is the first recorded victim of the current situation. Sadly, one of the longest-established companies in the audio business announced that is shutting up shop, and even more poignant is the fact that this family company has been forced into this position in its centenary year.

Though Ichikawa Jewel Co Ltd may not be a familiar name, its Jelco-branded tonearms, phono cartridges and other turntable accessories have been not only widely known in their own right but also used by other companies under their own brands. Having started out in 1920 making jewel bearings for applications such as watches and metering devices, the Japanese firm found itself ideally placed to make the fine styluses needed when the LP age dawned, and since then has been handmaking its products for vinyl enthusiasts. However, the current situation was just the final straw for a company hampered by an ageing workforce of craftspeople using tried and trusted – but by its own admission obsolete – production equipment.

It's only to be hoped that a successor is found to continue the production of its designs, especially in what we are told continues to be a boom age for vinyl replay, and that the demise of Jelco proves to be an isolated incident in these unsure times. After all, I can think of nothing better to lift the spirits than great music played to a high standard – and that's just what the hi-fi industry has to offer. 



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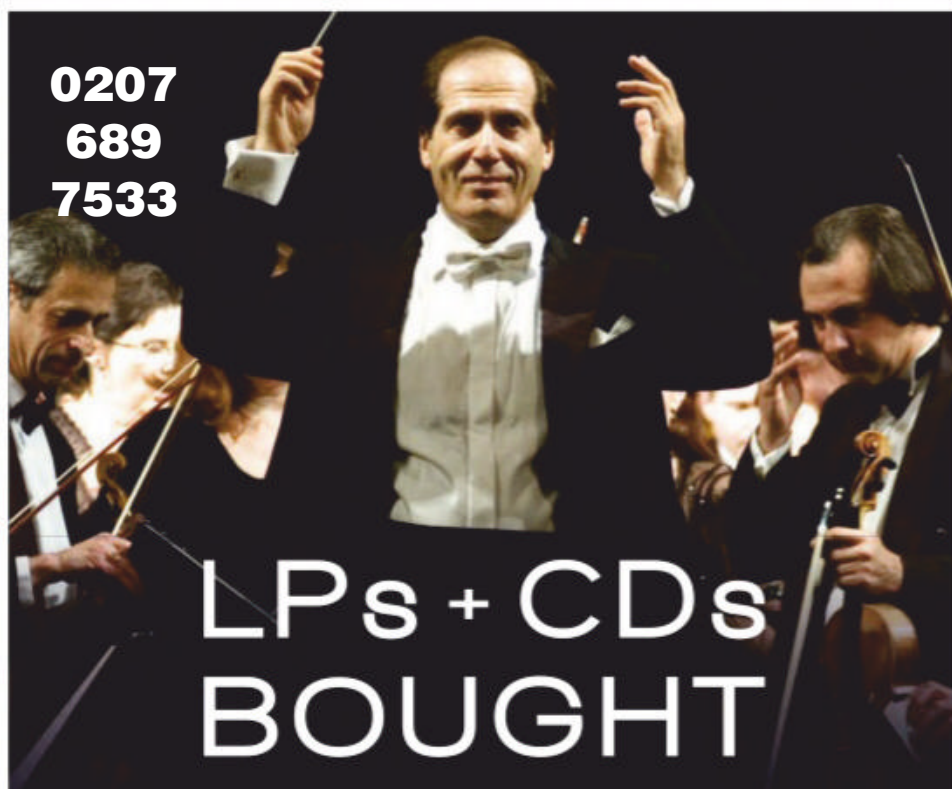


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# NOTES & LETTERS

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## Let's hear it for the pianists!

While it was a joy to read the excellent review of Roderick Williams's wonderful *Schwanengesang* recording in the June edition (page 71), I was saddened to see that the contribution of his pianist partner and collaborator, the excellent and eminent Iain Burnside, was dismissed in about half a sentence.

A quick check on a few previous issues reveals that this is not uncommon, yet it doesn't seem to occur in reviews of violin sonata recordings and the like. I am sure singers are aware of the debt they owe to their partners and are, perhaps, sometimes embarrassed by this. Perhaps your team of reviewers might like to take this into consideration when they review such song recital discs in the future? And I wonder, too, if your excellent magazine might like to consider running interview articles with some of the many first-rate pianist partners singers are lucky enough to have these days?

Rev Brian Gardner  
Banbury, Oxon

## Gramophone's Lockdown Gala

A very big thank you to everyone who made the Lockdown Gala happen on May 11. An evening of superb music-making with so many highlights!

David Charlton  
via email

## Don't forget Bridge ...

Every month I look forward to the 'What Next' item for I'm extremely hungry for new repertoire. In your April issue, which took Barber's *Adagio for Strings* as its starting point, it was especially interesting because many of the works mentioned were new to me. I felt, however, that one missing work deserved a place: *Lament* by Frank Bridge. In 1915 a German submarine torpedoed the British ocean liner Lusitania killing 1200 people, including Bridge's friends and their daughter Catherine, aged nine. Bridge loved this girl and channelled his grief into a composition for strings, later adapted for piano: the deeply tragic *Lament* (1915), dedicated to Catherine. This was his first composition that described his feelings about the war. The premiere was during the 1915 Queen's Hall Promenade Season, the odd man out in a concert that consisted of popular Italian music. But according

## Letter of the Month

### When Howells overheard Elgar and Kreisler

When reading Rob Cowan's helpful and very enjoyable review of Nicola Benedetti's new recording of the Elgar Violin Concerto (June, page 33), I was reminded of a super anecdote we found when I edited a volume of *The Elgar Family Diaries 1908-1910* with the late Martin Bird, which your readers might enjoy.

Herbert Howells recalled that one day at the 1910 Three Choirs Festival held that year at Gloucester, his teacher Herbert Brewer asked him to deliver a telegram to Elgar and to hand it to him personally. Elgar had taken a house near the Cathedral for the week of the festival. Howells took the telegram and as he waited at the front door to be let in, he could hear music from a violin and piano. 'The door opened. I told the factotum I must give the telegram to Sir Edward myself. He asked me in, but with a polite warning: "It might mean waiting. Sir Edward is upstairs with Mr Kreisler, practising."



Elgar: his Violin Concerto was overheard by Herbert Howells

He added, conspiratorially: "I suggest you sit quietly at the top of the stairs, by the drawing-room door." I did just that, for about 40 minutes, entranced by hearing what I later knew was the slow movement of the Violin Concerto.'

Paul Chennell  
via email

Ed: For more details of the book *'The Elgar Family Diaries 1908-1910'* edited by Paul Chennell and Martin Bird, please visit [elgar.org](http://elgar.org)

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to a critic in *The Musical Times* the audience was 'spellbound'.

Thijs Bongers  
Breda, The Netherlands

## ... or Horenstein

I am very grateful to *Gramophone* for giving space in recent issues (April and, before that, February) to examination of Jascha Horenstein's recordings of Mahler's Third and Fourth Symphonies. Jascha Horenstein has for many years been underappreciated, a view that is borne out by the complete absence of his name from the list in your magazine of

notable recordings of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony (April 2020). His landmark 1956 Vox recording of this symphony surely stands out as one of the first and finest LP interpretations available.

Gavin Bantock  
Kashiwa, Japan

## Mirella Freni as Mimì ...

Thank you for Edward Seckerson's warm tribute to Mirella Freni (May, page 13) which I heartily endorse – although I don't at all accept his view of Freni's Mimì in the Karajan/Berlin *La bohème*! I find the Freni/Pavarotti partnership



## NEXT MONTH AUGUST 2020



### Opera and concerts on screen

Global audiences are today watching concerts and operas online in ever greater numbers – and not just during lockdown.

We talk to some of the most innovative venues, artists and directors delivering performances straight to your living room

### Max Bruch

One hundred years since the composer's death, Andrew Mellor encourages us to look beyond the famous First Violin Concerto to find undiscovered gems

### Bernstein's Mass

Edward Seckerson listens to the recordings of this seminal, one-of-a-kind Bernstein work

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simply wonderful and the same goes for the orchestra. For those readers who would like to hear a 'younger' Freni as Mimì, look no further than the live Vienna State Opera performance (November 1963) on RCA – Karajan again conducting with first-rate principals.

Mike Coates

Lymm, Cheshire

### ... and more from Freni

Like I'm sure countless other readers of *Gramophone* I was very moved by Edward Seckerson's heartfelt tribute to Mirella Freni. He refers (how could he not?) to Freni's performance as Maria/Amelia on Abbado's DG set of Verdi's *Simon Boccanegra*. As a matter of fact, I didn't actually own a copy of this legendary recording until a few weeks before the soprano's death. I was browsing in the

Oxfam music shop in Lichfield when there it was, in superb condition, for just £1.99! It's on days like these that you know the gods of music are your side.

Roger Walker

Lichfield, Staffs

### Editorial note

A couple of erroneous premieres crept into Jennifer Bate's obituary (June). She gave the first *British* performance of Messiaen's *Livre du Saint-Sacrement* in October 1986. The work had been premiered in Detroit in July by Almut Rössler. Likewise, though she recorded Peter Dickinson's Organ Concerto, the work was both written for and premiered by Simon Preston and the CBSO in Gloucester Cathedral at the 1971 Three Choirs Festival. Our thanks to Kenneth Shenton for supplying this information.

## OBITUARIES

### GABRIEL BACQUIER

Baritone

Born May 17, 1924

Died May 13, 2020



The French baritone Gabriel Bacquier, a noted Scarpia and Golaud (*Pelléas et Mélisande*), has died at 95. A magnificent actor, Bacquier was born in Béziers and

studied locally at first before moving to the Paris Conservatoire. He made his debut with the Compagnie Lyrique, and then moved to La Monnaie in Brussels for three years before returning to Paris where, in 1956, he joined the Opéra Comique. During his time with the company he made his debut as Sharpless (*Madama Butterfly*), Alfio (*Cavalleria rusticana*), Albert (*Werther*) and Gianni Schicchi. He also made his first appearance at the Paris Opera as Germont père in *La traviata*. In 1960 he sang Scarpia opposite Renata Tebaldi's Tosca at the Paris Opera, making the role very much his own – he would later sing the part with some of the other great Toscas of the day, including Régine Crespin, Birgit Nilsson, Leontyne Price, Leonie Rysanek and Antonietta Stella.

The 1960s saw his career launched on the great stages of the world: Glyndebourne in 1962 where he would sing the *Figaro* Count (a live recording

has been released on Glyndebourne's own label – he would also record the role for Klemperer/EMI) and the same year he appeared at Chicago's Lyric Opera as the High Priest of Dagon in *Samson et Dalila*. In 1964, he sang at Covent Garden as Sir Richard Forth in *I puritani* opposite Joan Sutherland's Elvira and also at the Met, again as Saint-Saëns's High Priest.

His roles by now had embraced Escamillo (*Carmen*), the villains from *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (a Bacquier speciality which he recorded magnificently opposite Sutherland and Plácido Domingo for Decca), Don Giovanni, Leporello and Don Alfonso (*Così fan tutte*), Fra Melitone (*La forza del destino*), Lescaut in Massenet's opera, Dulcamara (*L'elisir d'amore*) and Bartolo in Rossini's *Il barbiere di Siviglia*. He had also performed Iago in *Otello*, a role he recorded on Solti's first Decca set: 'Bacquier ... is one of the subtlest Iagos on disc, his verbal colouring unmatched by anyone except Gobbi,' wrote Alan Blyth in *Gramophone*'s May 1994 issue.

He was a much sought-after recording artist and his broad catalogue includes Prokofiev's *The Love for Three Oranges* (Nagano/Virgin Classics), Rossini's *Guillaume Tell* (Gardelli/Philips), Ravel's *L'heure espagnole* (Maazel/DG), Chabrier's *L'étoile* (Gardiner/EMI), Massenet's *Thaïs* (Rudel/RCA), Gounod's *Mireille* (Plasson/EMI), Offenbach's *Les contes d'Hoffmann* (in addition to the Decca version under Bonyngé, he also recorded the baritone roles for Nagano/Virgin



Classics and Ozawa/DG), Don Giovanni (Bonyngel/Decca), Leporello and Don Alfonso (Solti/Decca), *La forza del destino* (Levine/RCA), Offenbach's *La belle Hélène* opposite Jessye Norman (Plasson/EMI), Donizetti's *Favorita* (Bonyngel/Decca), Delibes's *Lakmé* (Bonyngel/Decca), Bizet's *La jolie fille de Perth* (Prêtre/EMI), Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* (Bonyngel/Decca), Charpentier's *Louise* (Prêtre/CBS), Somarone in *Béatrice et Bénédict* (John Nelson/Erato) and Golaud in Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (Casadesu/Naxos).

A characterful and subtle recitalist, Bacquier recorded many *mélodies* in the company of pianists such as Jacques Février, Claudie Martinet, Dalton Baldwin and Jean Laforge. Of his contribution to EMI's classic set of Ravel's complete *mélodies*, Bacquier drew the following comment from Patrick O'Connor: 'I cannot recall a more enjoyable performance of *Histoires naturelles*. The smile in Bacquier's voice, his exquisite diction and timing make this the highlight of the first CD' (*Gramophone*, 2/97).

Bacquier was also a sought-after teacher, holding positions at the training school of the Paris Opéra, the Paris Conservatoire, Monaco's Academy of Music and the Festival du Chant Lyrique du Cap Corse (Corsica).

Bacquier married four times: his third wife was the soprano Michèle Command and his fourth the mezzo Sylvie Oussenko (who survives him).

## NORBERT BALATSCH

*Conductor*

*Born March 10, 1928*

*Died May 6, 2020*



Choral music accompanied Norbert Balatsch, who has died at the age of 92, throughout his life. Born in Vienna, he sang with the city's legendary

Sängerknaben and, when his voice broke, he joined the Vienna State Opera Chorus as a baritone. It was at the State Opera that he started conducting choirs and by 1968 he'd been appointed Chorus Director, a role he held until 1983.

Other choirs he trained and conducted were the (New) Philharmonia Chorus from 1975 to 1980, the Bayreuth Festival Chorus (1972-99), the Coro dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (1984-99 and then again 2006-08) and the Wiener Sängerknaben (1999-2001).

At Bayreuth, his first assignment was training the chorus for Götz Friedrich's production of *Tannhäuser*, conducted successively by Erich Leinsdorf, Horst Stein, Heinrich Hollreiser and Sir Colin Davis. He also conducted the chorus for the centennial (so-called 'French') *Ring* cycle directed by Patrice Chéreau and conducted by Pierre Boulez.

For recordings he prepared choruses for Carlo Maria Giulini's Philharmonia Mozart Requiem (EMI) and many of Riccardo Muti's Philharmonia choral projects, Sir Georg Solti's Mahler Eighth, *Der Rosenkavalier* and first *Zauberflöte* (all Decca) and Nikolaus Harnoncourt's 2001 *Gramophone* Award-winning *St Matthew Passion* (Teldec).

## NEIL HOWLETT

*Baritone*

*Born July 24, 1934*

*Died May 21, 2020*



Neil Howlett won the Kathleen Ferrier Memorial Scholarship while still a student at Cambridge, enabling him to continue his studies in Vienna, Milan and Stuttgart (1958-59) where he also worked on Lieder with Hermann Reutter at the Musikhochschule.

Early recognition came when he was a member of Benjamin Britten's English Opera Group. In 1964 he sang in the world premiere of Britten's *Curlew River*, and this led to appearances at Covent Garden, Welsh National Opera, Scottish Opera – and English National Opera, where he was a member for 17 years.

His extensive repertoire embraced over 80 roles including Scarpia, Iago, Macbeth, Boccanegra, Renato, Amfortas, Golaud, Almaviva, Jokanaan and, as he moved further into Wagnerian waters, Wotan/Wanderer.

He appears on many major London-made recordings in smaller roles, but with the ENO company he recorded one of his most celebrated roles, Iago in *Otello* opposite Charles Craig and Rosalind Plowright and conducted by Mark Elder. 'But good as Craig may be', wrote Alan Blyth in March 1984, 'the interpretation of the set is Neil Howlett's Iago. This is a reading that can be set beside Gobbi's (Serafin) and Valdengo's (Toscanini) and feel no need to fear the comparison. Howlett should have been recorded long ago; now the waiting is rewarded by hearing him in his best role, his tone,

as I have often remarked in the theatre, [Pasquale] Amato-like in its cut and vibrancy, and his matching of the English text to the Verdian demands for legato exemplary in every way.'

He was a professor at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama from 1974 to 1992, and then Head of Vocal Studies and later Director of Repertoire Studies at the Royal Northern College of Music.

## MARTIN LOVETT

*Cellist*

*Born March 3, 1927;*

*Died April 29, 2020*



The English cellist Martin Lovett, best known as a member of the Amadeus Quartet, has died aged 93.

Lovett was born into a musical family; his father was a cellist with the Hallé and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. Aged 15, Lovett won a scholarship to study at the Royal College of Music. Here, he met Suzanne Rozsa who later became his wife for 55 years.

In 1947, he joined up with three Austrian émigrés from Nazi-occupied Vienna to form the Amadeus Quartet. Despite differences in age (he was five years younger than his colleagues) and nationality, they immediately enjoyed a close rapport. 'I was the baby of the group,' Lovett recalled. 'They used to call me "the Benjamin". I had to learn German quickly.'

Their smooth, seamless style of playing attracted a large following and over the years they recorded much of the key quartet repertoire, mainly for DG (their complete Beethoven string quartets recording remains a classic).

When the Amadeus Quartet was admitted into *Gramophone*'s Hall of Fame in June 2013, Edward Dushinberre of the Takács Quartet wrote: 'Each member of the group brought a powerful musical personality to the mix and yet they combined magically to create exhilaratingly cohesive performances.' He went on to single out their recordings of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms.

Following the death of viola player Peter Schidlöf and the disbandment of the quartet in 1987, Lovett continued to work as a teacher, mentor and competition judge. As a member of the Amadeus Quartet he was awarded an OBE and received the German Grand Cross of Merit and the Austrian Cross of Honour for Science and Art.



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Passacaglia, BWV582	<b>RR Bennett</b> Anniversaries	<b>E</b>	<b>Godowsky</b> Alt Wien (arr Heifetz)	<b>K</b>
Pièce d’orgue, BWV572	Aubade	<b>Eisler</b> Fünf Elegien – No 23, Jeden Morgen mein Brot zu verdienen; No 24, Diese Stadt hat mich belehrt	53 Studies on Chopin’s Études, Vol 1	<b>Kapustin</b> Duo, Op 99
Praeludium (Harpeggiando), BWV921	Country Dances	<b>Elgar</b> The Music Makers, Op 69	<b>Gould</b> Spirituals	Quartet, Op 88
Six Solo Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012	Piano Concerto	Piano Quintet, Op 84	Stringmusic	Quintet, Op 89
	Troubadour Music	Sea Pictures, Op 37	Symphonettes – No 2; No 3; No 4, ‘Latin-American Symphonette’	<b>Korngold</b> Much Ado About Nothing – Suite, Op 11
<b>Bairstow</b> Blessed city, heavenly Salem	<b>Bernstein</b> Silhouette (Galilee)	<b>Enescu</b> Piano Trio No 1	<b>Granados</b> Tonadillas en estilo antiguo (excs)	<b>Kreek</b> Bless the Lord, my soul
The Blessed Virgin’s Cradle Song	<b>Brahms</b> Piano Pieces – Op 117 No 2; Op 118; Op 119	<b>F</b>	<b>Gray</b> Magnificat and Nunc dimittis in F minor	By the rivers of Babylon
If the Lord had not helped me	Salamander, Op 107 No 2	<b>Fagerlund</b> Kromos	<b>Grigny</b> Pange lingua, récit du chant de l’hymne précédent	Lord, I cry unto thee
Jesu, grant me this I pray	<b>Brandl</b> Nanthild, das Mädchen von Valbella – Overture	<b>Falla</b> Siete Canciones populares españolas	<b>Gruenberg</b> Jazzette, Op 26 No 3	Praise the name of the Lord (Orthodox Vespers)
The king of love my shepherd is	Symphonie concertante, Op 20			The sun shall not smite thee
The Lamentation	Symphony in D			
Let all mortal flesh keep silence	<b>Bretón</b> String Quartets – No 1; No 3			
Lord, I call upon thee	<b>Britten</b> Introduction and Allegro			
Lord, thou hast been our refuge	Songs and Proverbs of William Blake – A Poison Tree			
Of the Father’s love begotten	<b>C</b>			
Our Father in the heavens	<b>Casals</b> Al ángel travieso			
Save us, O Lord	En el mirall canviant de la mar blava			
Though I speak with the tongues of men	En sourdine			
<b>Barry</b> Beethoven	Tres Estrofas de amor			
Piano Concerto				
<b>Bartók</b> Dance Suite, Sz77				
Divertimento, Sz113				
Music for Strings, Percussion and Celesta, Sz106				
<b>Beach</b> Piano Quintet, Op 67				



<b>L</b>  <b>Lambert</b> The Long-Departed Lover <b>67</b> Trois Pièces nègres pour les touches blanches <b>67</b> Three Poems by Li Po <b>67</b> Four Poems by Li Po <b>67</b> <b>La Tombelle</b> Orientale <b>72</b> <b>Lekeu</b> Trois poèmes – Nocturne <b>72</b> <b>Lemoyne</b> Phèdre <b>76</b> <b>Liszt</b> La lugubre gondole II <b>72</b> <b>Louiguy</b> La vie en rose <b>72</b> <b>M</b>  <b>Machaut</b> O Jesus, thy pain/Dame, vostre doulz viaire (arr Kreek) <b>66</b>  <b>Mahler</b> Das irdische Leben <b>72</b> <b>Massenet</b> Nuit d’Espagne <b>72</b> <b>Messenger</b> L’amour masqué – J’ai deux amants <b>72</b>  <b>Messiaen</b> Harawi – Bonjour toi, colombe verte <b>72</b>  <b>Montalbeti</b> Duo, ‘Lied des Dankes für das Leben in Freundschaft’ <b>48</b> Hommage à Matisse <b>48</b> Piano Trio <b>48</b> String Quartet, ‘Harmonieuses dissonances’ <b>48</b>  <b>Montsalvatge</b> Cinco Canciones negras <b>50</b>  <b>Mozart</b> Adagio, K540 <b>59</b> Bassoon Concerto, K191  <b>33</b> Fantasia, K475 <b>60</b> Gigue, K574 <b>59</b> Piano Sonatas – No 10, K330; No 11, K331; No 18, K576 <b>59</b> Piano Sonatas – No 14, K457; No 16, K545  <b>60</b> <b>Mussorgsky</b> Pictures at an Exhibition (orch Ravel) <b>36</b>  <b>Mustonen</b> Sonata No 2  <b>61</b> <b>N</b>  <b>Novák</b> A Tale of the Heart, Op 8 <b>71</b> <b>P</b>  <b>Parry</b> Songs of Farewell <b>69</b> <b>Pfitzner</b> Röschen biss den Apfel an, Op 33 No 6 <b>72</b> <b>Piazzolla</b> Le Grand Tango <b>50</b>	<b>Piston</b> Symphony No 7 <b>41</b> <b>G Prokofiev</b> BEETHOVEN9 Symphonic Remix <b>S Prokofiev</b> Symphony No 3, Op 44 <b>28</b> <b>Purcell</b> Sleep, Adam sleep, Z195 <b>72</b> <b>R</b>  <b>Rachmaninov</b> A-oo!, Op 38 No 6 <b>72</b> Arion, Op 34 No 5 <b>71</b> How fair this spot, Op 21 No 7 <b>71</b> Prelude, Op 32 No 12 <b>60</b> Serenade, Op 3 No 5 <b>50</b> Six Songs, Op 4 – No 4, Sing not to me, beautiful maiden; No 5, O thou, my field <b>71</b> Spring waters, Op 14 No 11 <b>71</b> <b>Raison</b> Christe (Trio en passacaille) <b>54</b> <b>Rameau</b> L’Indiscrète  <b>60</b> Le rappel des oiseaux <b>60</b> Les Sauvages <b>60</b> <b>Ravel</b> L’enfant et les sortilèges – Air du feu <b>72</b>  Piano Trio <b>47</b> Trois beaux oiseaux du paradis <b>72</b> La valse <b>36</b> <b>Reimann</b> Gib mir den Apfel <b>72</b> <b>Respighi</b> La bella dormente nel bosco   <b>77</b>  <b>Reznicek</b> String Quartets Nos 1 & 3-6 <b>48</b> <b>Rimsky-Korsakov</b> Softly the soul flew up to heaven, Op 27 No 1 <b>71</b> Two Songs, Op 56 <b>71</b> <b>Ropartz</b> Quatre Poèmes – Ceux qui, parmi les morts d’amour <b>72</b> <b>G Rose</b> Birthday Ode for Aaron Copland <b>36</b> Red Planet <b>36</b> Seven Dances from Danse macabre <b>36</b> Suite pour cordes <b>36</b> Violin Concerto <b>36</b> <b>Rózsa</b> Toccata capricciosa, Op 36 <b>50</b> <b>S</b>  <b>Saint-Saëns</b> Désir de l’orient <b>72</b> <b>P Scharwenka</b> Four Konzertstücke, Op 104 <b>49</b> Piano Trios – Op 105; Op 121 <b>49</b> Viola Sonata, Op 106 <b>49</b> <b>Schoenberg</b> Erwartung, Op 17 <b>37</b> Pelleas und Melisande, Op 5 <b>37</b> Saget mir, auf welchem Pfade, Op 15 No 5 <b>50</b>	<b>Schubert</b> Abendbilder, D650 <b>69</b> Abendstern, D806 <b>72</b> Abends unter der Linde, D235 <b>69</b> Alinde, D904 <b>69</b> Allegretto, D915 <b>60</b> Allegro, ‘Lebensstürme’, D947 <b>60</b> Am Meer, D957 No 12 <b>69</b> An den Mond, D193 <b>69</b> An den Mond, D259 <b>69</b> An die Laute, D905 <b>69</b> Auflösung, D807 <b>72</b> Des Fischers Liebesgluck, D933 <b>69</b> Erlkönig, D328 <b>69</b> Fantasie, D940 <b>60</b> Die Forelle, D550 <b>69</b> Impromptu, D935 No 2 <b>60</b> Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren, D360 <b>69</b> Moment musical, D780 No 1  <b>60</b> Nacht und Träume, D827 <b>69</b> Nachtgesang, D119 <b>69</b> Rondos – D608; D951 <b>60</b> Das Rosenband, D280 <b>69</b> Sonata, D617 <b>60</b> Die Sterne, D939 <b>69</b> Die Sternennacht, D670 <b>69</b> Der Vater mit dem Kind, D906 <b>69</b> Three Violin Sonatinas <b>50</b> Der Winterabend, D938 <b>69</b> <b>Schumann</b> Arabeske, Op 18  <b>60</b> Das Paradies und die Peri, Op 50 – Jetzt sank des Abends goldner Schein <b>72</b> Warte, warte wilder Schiffmann, Op 24 No 6 <b>72</b> <b>Scriabin</b> Impromptu à la mazur, Op 2 No 3 <b>60</b> Mazurkas – cpte <b>60</b> <b>Shostakovich</b> Orchestral Works <b>88</b> Symphonies – No 1, Op 10; No 5, Op 47  <b>38</b> Violin Concertos – No 1, Op 77; No 2, Op 129 <b>38</b> <b>Sørensen</b> La mattina <b>38</b> Serenidad <b>38</b> Trumpet Concerto <b>38</b> <b>Stanford</b> Magnificat, Op 164 <b>69</b> Three Motets, Op 38 <b>69</b> <b>Staud</b> Stromab <b>28</b> <b>R Strauss</b> Aus Italien, Op 16 <b>28</b> Orchestral Works <b>88</b> Tone Poems – cpte <b>87</b> <b>Stravinsky</b> Berceuse <b>50</b> Pastorale <b>72</b> <b>Sullivan</b> Haddon Hall  <b>78</b>	<b>T</b>  <b>Tan Dun</b> Seven Desires  <b>61</b> <b>Tchaikovsky</b> All-Night Vigil, Op 52 <b>69</b> The Angel Cried Out <b>69</b> Does the day reign, Op 47 No 6 <b>71</b> Hymn in Honour of Saints Cyril and Methodius <b>69</b> Jurists’ Song <b>69</b> A Legend, Op 54 No 5 <b>69</b> The mild stars shone for us, Op 60 No 12 <b>71</b> Overtures <b>88</b> Symphonies – cpte <b>88</b> Why?, Op 6 No 5 <b>71</b> <b>Thwaites</b> Lead, kindly light <b>70</b> Christmas Songs <b>70</b> India – Australia – Africa <b>70</b> Love Songs <b>70</b> Missa brevis <b>70</b> Psalm 19, ‘The heavens tell out the glory of God’ <b>70</b> Psalm 23, ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ <b>70</b>  Psalm 24, ‘The earth is the Lord’s’ <b>70</b> Psalm 121, ‘I will lift up mine eyes’ <b>70</b> St Teresa’s Bookmark <b>70</b> Five Shakespeare Songs <b>70</b> <b>Tiensuu</b> Daydreams  <b>61</b> <b>Toch</b> Three Impromptus, Op 90c <b>50</b> <b>Traditional</b> Awake, my heart (arr Kreek) <b>66</b> Do the birds worry? (arr Kreek) <b>66</b> From heaven above to earth I come (arr Kreek) <b>66</b> He, who lets God prevail (arr Kreek) <b>66</b>  Jacob’s Dream/Proemial Psalm (Orthodox Vespers) (arr Kreek) <b>66</b>  Whilst great is our poverty (arr Kreek) <b>66</b> <b>V</b>  <b>Varèse</b> Amériques <b>28</b> <b>Vasks</b> Symphony for Strings, ‘Voices’  <b>39</b> Viola Concerto  <b>39</b> <b>I Venables</b> Aurelia, Op 37 No 3 <b>70</b> Chamber Music III, Op 41 No 6 <b>70</b> I caught the changes of the year, Op 45 No 1 <b>70</b> It Rains, Op 33 No 2 <b>70</b> Love lives beyond the tomb, Op 37 No 1 <b>70</b> Remember This, Op 40 <b>70</b> Through These Pale Cold Days, Op 46 <b>70</b> The Way Through, Op 33 No 1 <b>70</b> <b>Verdi</b> Nabucco   <b>79</b> Otello <b>80</b> <b>Villa-Lobos</b> Bachianas Brasileiras No 5 – Ária (Cantilena) <b>50</b>	<b>Vivaldi</b> Flautino Concerto, RV443 <b>40</b> Flute Concertos – ‘La tempesta di mare’, Op 10 No 1 RV433; RV442; RV445 <b>40</b> Nisi Dominus, RV608 – Cum dederit <b>40</b> Recorder Concertos – RV441; RV444 <b>40</b>  Il Tigrane – Lascierà l’amata; Qui mentre mormorando; Squarciami pure il seno <b>81</b> Violin Concertos – RV187; RV217; RV235; ‘Il Carbonelli’, RV321; RV366; RV387 <b>40</b> <b>W</b>  <b>Walton</b> Beatriz’s Song (arr C Palmer) <b>67</b> Daphne <b>67</b> Façade Suites (arr Lambert) – No 1; No 2 <b>67</b> Siesta <b>67</b> Tritons <b>67</b> Under the Greenwood Tree <b>67</b> The Winds <b>67</b> <b>Waxman</b> Carmen-Fantasy <b>50</b> <b>Weber</b> Bassoon Concerto, Op 75  <b>33</b> Der Freischütz <b>80</b> <b>Weinberg</b> Chamber Symphony No 4, Op 153 <b>40</b> Clarinet Concerto, Op 104 <b>40</b> Clarinet Sonata, Op 28 <b>40</b> <b>Widor</b> Piano Quintet No 1, Op 7 – Molto vivace <b>72</b> <b>Wolf</b> Goethe Lieder – No 26, Die Spröde; No 27, Die Bekehrte <b>72</b> <b>Wölfli</b> Piano Sonata, Op 33 No 3 <b>61</b> <b>C Wood</b> Nunc dimittis in B flat <b>69</b> <b>Z</b>  <b>Zelenka</b> Credo, ZWV32 <b>71</b> Gloria, ZWV30 <b>71</b> Kyrie, Sanctus & Agnus Dei, ZWV26 <b>71</b> Salve regina, ZWV137 <b>71</b> <b>Collections</b> ‘50th Anniversary’ – Collegium Vocale Gent, Philippe Herreweghe <b>87</b> ‘450 Years Staatskapelle Berlin – Great Recordings’ <b>84</b> ‘Arion: Voyage of a Slavic Soul’ – Natalya Romaniw <b>71</b> ‘The Art of Carmen Dragon’ <b>89</b> ‘Aspects of America: Pulitzer Edition’ <b>41</b>  ‘The Beethoven Connection’ – Jean-Efflam Bavouzet <b>61</b> ‘Cantilena’ – Tabea Zimmermann <b>50</b> ‘Exiles in Paradise’ – Brinton Averil Smith <b>50</b> ‘A Genius on the Violin’ – Michael Rabin <b>89</b> ‘Kromos’ – Ismo Eskelinen  <b>61</b> ‘Modern Times Edition’ – Karl-Hainz Steffens <b>87</b> ‘A New Century’ – The Cleveland Orchestra <b>28</b> ‘Nuits’ – Véronique Gens <b>72</b> ‘The Other Cleopatra: Queen of Armenia’ – Isabel Bayrakdarian <b>81</b> ‘Paradise Lost’ – Anna Prohaska <b>72</b> Piano Concertos – Friedrich Gulda <b>89</b> Piano Works – Alexei Lubimov <b>87</b>
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# Ruth Padel

The poet celebrates Beethoven year with a collection exploring his life and works

My father's family connections go back to a German tradition of music-making. His grandfather was a concert pianist taught in Leipzig by Ignaz Moscheles, who made the piano transcription of *Fidelio* for Beethoven. He settled in York, teaching and playing – he taught George Butterworth – and my father's family grew up playing quartets. An old family photo shows them with their instruments, with a bust of Beethoven presiding above. We did too. I have a photo of us in the 1960s, my father and brother on cello, me on viola, my sister and brothers on violin.

When did I first meet Beethoven? As a piano piece, an *écossaise*. Before I learned viola, I was taught piano by Olive Lewin, who I believe was the first black student at the Royal Academy. She enticed me to practise by accompanying me in folksongs from *The Penguin Song Book*. She really encouraged me; I loved singing. Then I lost her. She went back to Jamaica, to work towards the collection of Jamaica's traditional music, and became a hugely distinguished cultural historian there. All my life I have been indebted to her infectious enjoyment of the whole spectrum of music, folk to classical.

My viola teacher was Kay Hurwitz. The first Beethoven quartet I played in public was with her son Mike on cello. That was Opus 18 No 5, but it was the late quartets, which I got to know on records, that blew me away. There's a history of poets being inspired by the late quartets – I think partly to do with their innovativeness. Beethoven said, 'We must go back to the old things in a new way,' which is exactly what poets do. Like composers, we have so much to draw on, such a rich tradition, and all the time we are trying to reinvent it. The late quartets, which inspired TS Eliot's *Four Quartets*, are such an image of 'going beyond'. Extraordinarily profound emotion, melody and rhythm, in extraordinarily original architecture.

My Beethoven book arose out of working with the Endellion Quartet. The first thing we did together was Haydn's *Seven Last Words*. I'd been commissioned by Tring Chamber Music to write poems between the movements, then did it with the Endellions. The Aspect Foundation commissioned me to write poems for a Beethoven concert of theirs, to go between Op 18 No 6 and Op 131. The Quartet were so welcoming. Brought up playing quartets, I sort of felt part of them and loved working with them. I discussed Beethoven a lot with the cellist David Waterman, who lent me books, and decided to turn my poems into a poetry biography.

I had written one biography in poems about Charles Darwin, my great-grandfather on my mother's side. There, I used marginalia to show the development of his thought. With Beethoven, I used quotations from him as epigraphs, and incorporated them in a little prose biography as a coda. I researched it in Bonn and then Vienna, but it was the quartets that were always running through my head and my



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underlying question was how, in Bonn, a pretty remote corner of the Holy Roman Empire, did a gifted but recalcitrant boy with a drunk and violent father become the man who wrote the late quartets?

I increasingly focused on Beethoven's sense of relationship. His human relationships were difficult, stormy, sometimes violent, especially with his family. His friends were very forgiving, though he had sweetness and enthusiasm, too. But what he couldn't manage in relationships in life, he made up for in relationships in music. It seemed to me that the string quartet form – the stability and ricochets, question and answer – which four voices makes possible was for him the purest expression of that. In the beginning of Op 131, the way each voice takes the other for granted, comes in the same way, does something different with it but meshes with the others, is also an extraordinary allegory of ideal relationships. When I saw the manuscript in Krakow, it was like seeing the Holy Grail.

'My Beethoven' is when I hear that tragedy in his music, and then some new idea which makes you think 'Yes! There's hope!' That's his genius, the move from despair to hope. **G**  
*Ruth Padel's Beethoven Variations is published by Chatto & Windus (paperback £12)*



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